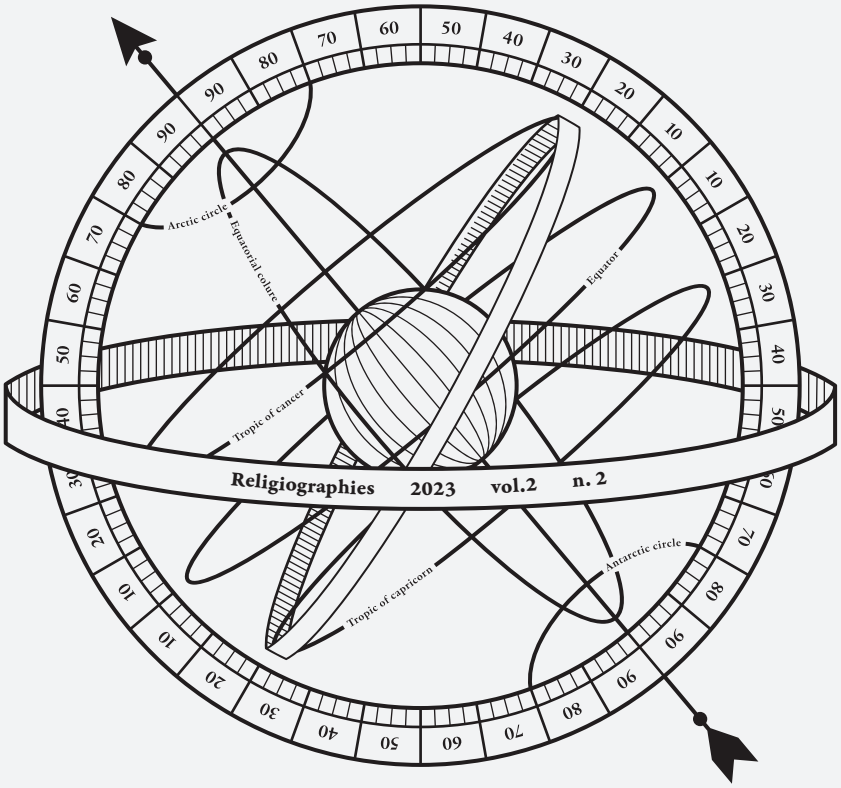
Religiographies



Special Issue
"Religious Dimensions of Nationalism"
edited by
Marios Hatzopoulos

Fondazione Giorgio Cini 2023 - vol.2 no.2 ISSN 2974-6469

Editorial board

Table of Contents

Editorial:

Introducing the Special Issue "Religious Dimensions of Nationalism"

Marios Hatzopoulos and Francesco Piraino

Centro Studi di Civiltà e Spiritualità Comparate
fondazione Giorgio Cini onlus

To cite this:
Hatzopoulos, Marios and Piraino, Francesco. "Editorial: Introducing the Special Issue 'Religious Dimensions of Nationalism.' " *Religiographies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2023): 1–8.

This thematic issue arose from a conference organized by the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, the Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms (SPIN), and the Center for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents of the University of Amsterdam; the organizers were Joep Leerssen and Marco Pasi (both at the University of Amsterdam) and Francesco Piraino.[1] (Fig. 1) It was literally one of the first face-to-face conferences to take place in Europe after two years of confinement due to pandemic restrictions.[2] The organizers of the conference, its presenters, and the contributors to this issue strived to show how closely nationalism and religion have been entangled in the last two centuries. There is little doubt that this entanglement, which still remains relatively inconspicuous in the field of nationalism studies, is worth a fresh focus.

Nationalism is usually seen as a secular force, arising within the framework of secularization and modernization. Equally, it is often treated as a profoundly anticlerical ideology, championing the pursuit of economic and social development in a "liberated" national community. Take for example Ernest Gellner, who conceded that modern industrial society relies on economic and cognitive growth, necessitating a homogeneous culture. Nationalism, identified as the crux of this homogenous culture, is inherently secular in Gellner's definition as it binds together an anonymous, impersonal society comprising interchangeable individuals. This viewpoint establishes a dichotomy between religion and nationalism, positing the latter as an intrinsic outcome of the decline of religion. Hence religion assumes the role of a diminishing phenomenon and is relegated to something of a residual category of the pre-modern past. It scarcely finds mention except as a backdrop, a part of the "traditional society" from which the transition to modernity commenced, and from which nations subsequently emerged.

Methodological modernism asserts that for a society to be considered modern, it must be secular. Not infrequently, modernism draws on the premise that religion only attains political significance in less developed corners of the globe. Contemporary expressions of political religiosity are often categorized as fundamentalism; that is, a negative societal influence diametrically opposed to science, rationality, and secularism—essentially, a resistance to modernity. Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* was the first to provide a philosophical underpinning to this viewpoint, fostering the prevalent notion, albeit less nuanced, that the Western world underwent a unique historical experience of secularization, juxtaposed against Asia and Africa, which purportedly grappled with a history marked by the hazardous politicization of religious differences. This perspective, however, is fundamentally flawed, perpetuating an outdated dichotomy between the supposedly advanced West and the ostensibly backward rest.

There are, however, debates on nationalism that have not ignored the role of religion. The tradition positing nationalism as a form of religion has deep roots in social theory from Durkheim, who highlighted the identity of sentiments and ideas between old religions and modern nations,[3] up to Carlton Hayes, who started to explore the concept in the 1920s. Hayes, in particular, contended that nationalism evokes a profound and essentially religious emotion, akin to faith in a deity. Drawing parallels with traditional religions, Hayes identified nationalism's speculative theology or mythology, notions of salvation and immortality, holy scriptures, and ritualistic practices centered around symbols like the flag. Despite these similarities, Hayes argued that nationalism diverges from traditional religions, which on the whole foster universal unity by re-enshrining "the earlier tribal

1
Marios Hatzopoulos wishes to express his appreciation and gratitude to Marco Pasi and Joep Leerssen for assigning him as editor of this special issue.

2
Accessed 12th December 2023, https://www.cini.it/en/events/nationalism-and-religion.

3
Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* trans. J. Swain (London: Allen & Unwin, 1915).

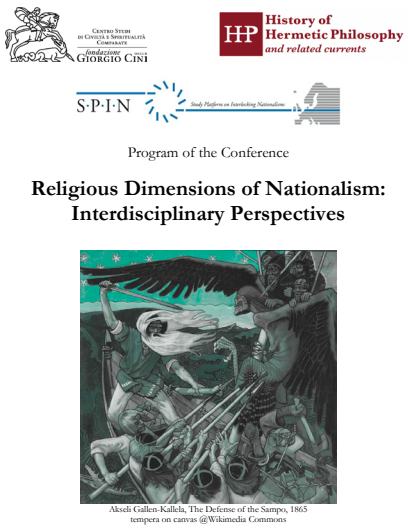


Fig. 1. Cover of the program, accessed 12th December 2023, https://www.cini.it/eventi/religious-dimensions-of-nationalism-interdisciplinary-perspectives.

mission of a chosen people" with all its "tribal selfishness and vainglory."[4]

Building on these ideas, Anthony D. Smith later offered a more sophisticated perspective, characterizing nationalism as a "new religion of the people." Smith delineated nationalism's religious qualities in both a substantive and functional sense, emphasizing its quest for collective salvation and the creation of a moral community bound by shared beliefs. In this new religion, authenticity becomes the functional equivalent of sanctity, and patriotic heroes and national geniuses serve as messiah-like figures sacrificing themselves for the community. Smith attributed the enduring emotional potency of national identities to the religious quality of nationalism, which parallels and competes with traditional religions, shaping the depth and intensity of national feelings and loyalties.[5]

More recently, Rogers Brubaker proposed that the intricate relationship between religion and nationalism would be best studied through four analytical paths.[6] The first treats religion and nationalism as analogous phenomena, seeking to define or characterize nationalism by highlighting its similarities to religion. This perspective often categorizes nationalism itself as a form of religion, exactly as Hayes and Smith argued.[7] The second path aims to elucidate how religion explains nationalism, exploring various facets such as its origins, persistence, emotional power, content, and form. Notably, research within this body of work has unveiled how religious motifs and narratives, particularly those associated with the myth of ethnic election, were instrumental in shaping early nationalist claims, as seen in the religious and political upheavals of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Netherlands and England.[8] The third path views religion not merely as an external force explaining nationalism but as an integral part of the phenomenon itself. In this analysis, religion becomes deeply intertwined with nationalism, supplying essential myths, metaphors, and symbols that contribute to the discursive or iconic representation of the nation.[9] Anthony Smith's work has extensively explored this theme, emphasizing how religious resources answer questions about the distinctiveness of a people in terms of history, character, identity, mission, or destiny. This intertwining extends to the use of religious or religiously tinged language and imagery to frame discussions about a nation's unique character. Conversely, scholars have also delved into the reciprocal phenomenon—the national or nationalist inflection of the religious discourse.[10] Proponents of the fourth and final path argue that religious nationalism represents a unique and distinctive form of nationalism. Unlike the previous approaches that focus on rhetorical forms, language, or imagery, this approach centers on the content of nationalist claims while arguing that religious nationalism constitutes a specific type of nationalist program that represents a distinct alternative to secular nationalism.[11]

Indeed, religious loyalties proved more resilient than modernists expected; politics across nineteenth-century Europe are characterized by a process of secularization as much as confessionalization. Far from disappearing from modern societies, religion has gone through a series of changes, in the sense of individualization and new forms of public presence. In connecting the analytical pathways mentioned above, this special issue of *Religiographies* brings together scholars from different disciplines who are interested in the relationship between nationalism and religion and who aim to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted interplay between them by shedding light on the various dimensions through which these two complex phenomena intersect and influence one another.

4
Carlton Hayes, *Essays on Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), 124–25.

5
Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples. Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

6
Rogers Brubaker, *Grounds for Difference* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 102–16.

7
To whom one may add the celebrated work of George Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975).

8
Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood. Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Philip S. Gorski, "The Mosaic Moment: An Early Modernist Critique of Modernist Theories of Nationalism," *American Journal of Sociology* 105, no.5 (March 2000): 1428–68. Cf. also Conor Cruise O 'Brien, *God-Land: Reflections on Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

9
Aviel Roshwald, *The Endurance of Nationalism: Ancient Roots and Modern Dilemmas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Steven Grosby, *Nations and Nationalism in World History* (London: Routledge 2022); Steven Grosby, *Biblical Ideas of Nationality: Ancient and Modern* (Pennsylvania: Eisenbrauns, 2022); Marios Hatzopoulos, "Ancient Prophecies, Modern Predictions: Myths and Symbols of Greek Nationalism," (PhD diss., University of London, 2005); Joep Leerssen's approach to nationalism also deals with religion, though it doesn't fall neatly within one of the paths discussed here; see, for instance, his *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

10
Lucian N. Leustean, *Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Southeastern Europe* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

11
Mark Jürgensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Philip W. Barker, *Religious Nationalism in Modern Europe: If God be for Us* (London: Routledge, 2009).

The contributions of the issue follow a chronological rather than thematic order. Some of them construe religion in the broadest sense, aspiring to bring mysticism, esotericism, and spirituality back into mainstream discussions of religious and cultural phenomena. However, the thread weaving together all the contributions is mainly the problematization of the modernist thesis.

In the first contribution, Alberto Scigliano explores the blending of religious and nationalist elements in the political discourse of seventeenth-century Netherlands. Dutch Reformed political discourse maintained a unique fusion of religious and nationalist ideals emphasizing the continuous relationship between sacred and human history and interpreting historical development through the lens of the Holy Scriptures. Reformed theologians delved into the political dimensions of the Bible, exploring the civic governance depicted in the Hebrew Bible and considering it as a model for Dutch political organization. The incorporation of biblical references and the Hebrew model into Dutch political thought played a pivotal role in shaping the Dutch national identity. It instilled the belief that the Dutch were a chosen people, bound to God through a sacred covenant, and associated with a Netherlandish Israel. In this political landscape, the relationship between religion and politics was not one of subordination but rather fusion and juxtaposition, where the civic realm was sacralized, and the confessional context politicized. This fusion of religious and national identity was instrumental in uniting the Dutch Republic and its citizens, who saw themselves as a chosen people protecting the freedom they had worked hard to attain, with their national identity deeply intertwined with their religious beliefs. Additionally, the article touches upon the resistance to tolerating religious diversity beyond rigorous Calvinism, as many Calvinist theologians believed that religious tolerance would weaken the strength required for governing the new state. In the Netherlands, religious diversity was not encouraged, and the nation was closely tied to a single confession, with Dutch people seen as political extensions of a religious doctrine that symbolized the essence of the Revolt. In this intellectual landscape, ethnic and religious political semantics merged to form a unique concept of the Dutch Republic as a civil and God-inspired political entity, emphasizing the salvation of Dutch citizens and their duty to defend their hard-won freedom. This complex interplay of religious and national elements produced a hybrid form where Calvinist theological readings and national awareness coexisted, helping to shape the Dutch state and its collective identity.

Looking beyond the dichotomy of religious and secular values, Marios Hatzopoulos comes next, exploring the complex relationship between the Enlightenment and religious beliefs in the context of the Greek Revolution (1821–1830). In Southern Europe, including Greece, liberals recognized the importance of religious morality in society's survival, putting forward a variety of liberal agendas without forsaking their established religions. As the Greek independence movement joined the broader wave of revolutions in the 1820s that swept across countries like Spain, Portugal, and Italy, Greek liberals began to share similar concerns and considerations. Hatzopoulos argues that the anti-clerical stance of a significant portion of Greek nationalists , and the clash between religious and secular ideas prior to the war of independence, did not lead to the detachment of large groups of Greeks from their religious values and practices. Instead, religion and patriotism found common ground as the movement

of national revival in Greece gained broader social support and faced increased membership demands. When the war against the Ottomans erupted in 1821, nationalism and religion converged and supported each other in various ways. This convergence was facilitated by political and military leaders of the insurgents, on one hand, and clergy and monks who aligned themselves with the Greek cause, on the other. Confronting Muslims on the battlefield brought them closer and transformed both groups. The connection between nationality and faith, established through the Greek constitutions of 1822 and 1823, was just one way in which the Greek revolution was infused with religious significance. Other means included religiously inspired violence, rituals, and ceremonies centered on veneration and mass reverence, the creation of new religious literature tailored for wartime purposes, actions on days of religious importance, religious rites and celebrations with patriotic intent, the adaptation of religious practices like hymn chanting, and concepts such as martyrdom to the culture of war. Lastly, the quasi-sanctification of the bodies of fallen patriots further emphasized the religious aspect. The sacralization of the revolutionary process fostered a collective commitment to the nation's values within a framework where the valor in conflict was rooted in faith, self-sacrifice for the community was revered, and death radiated the belief in collective regeneration.

In the wake of the French Revolution, a reactionary shift emerged within the Catholic Church as it confronted a new order that championed the principles of freedom and equality but purported to eradicate Christianity. The Church's efforts to uphold the traditional European order following the Restoration often clashed with the national aspirations of the Catholic nations, especially Poland. Against this backdrop, the contribution of Giulio Dalla Grana highlights the case of Andrzej Towiański, an influential figure in the nineteenth-century Polish intellectual landscape, who advocated a liberal-Catholic stance that harmonized nationalist ideas with Gospel teachings, viewing progress and national identity as compatible with the core tenets of Catholicism. Towiański's doctrine represented a fusion of progressive political goals and religious rejuvenation, seeking to affirm nations and reintroduce what he saw as Jesus Christ's original teachings within the Roman Church. Towiański's message resonated with diverse national communities, including Polish, French, Italian, and Jewish communities, largely owing to the prominent role he ascribed to each nation in shaping and saving humanity. His principal corpus of texts outlined the "Cause of God," a mission focused on the salvation and progress of humankind, with Napoleon considered a precursor to this cause. Towiański's teachings bore similarities to Kabbalist doctrines, reflecting a profound interest in the Jewish people. He delineated the roles of three Minister-Nations—Israel-Jew, Israel-French, and Israel-Slav—in implementing the Cause of God, emphasizing their spiritual unity and the establishment of free political life in their homelands. Towiański's perspective on Italians as a higher nation, destined to lead the way in manifesting Christianity in public life through their political regeneration, added depth to his religious and political thought, which was characterized by a strong messianic approach.

Marijan Dović comes next to explore the cultural and historical evolution of the veneration of cultural saints and the emergence of national pantheons in Europe during the nineteenth century. The article builds on the author's earlier work on "cultural saints" in the sense of deceased

poets, writers, and other artists and intellectuals who became embodiments of national ideals and assumed roles formerly reserved for rulers and saints. This process of canonization involved textual, ritual, and mnemonic practices, and it played a significant role in the formation of modern national literary cultures. Dović also emphasizes the structural parallels between the cults of religious saints and cultural saints, such as the *translatio* of relics, specific rituals tied to saints' days, pilgrimages, sacralized memorials, and hagiographic representations, particularly after the 1830s when national pantheons were created. National pantheons took physical forms like churches, cemeteries, and galleries of sculptures and paintings. These spaces allowed emerging national cultures to showcase their great personalities, thereby epitomizing the authenticity and achievement of their respective national communities.

In the following contribution, Federico Gobbo sheds light on the interplay between religious dimensions and nationalism within the Esperanto movement, showing that the ideology of neutralism in Esperanto is not entirely neutral. Esperanto's original author, Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof, had in mind not only a *pontolingvo* (bridge language) but also and mainly a *pontoreligio* (bridge religion) called Hillelism and, later, Homaranism. Zamenhof planted a little seed of his religious dimension inside the Esperanto community at its beginning, called *interna ideo* (internal idea), which is still present in the Esperanto movement. Gobbo further explores the ideology surrounding the non-religious parts of the movement, which tend to forge a collective identity around typical nationalistic symbols and rituals, such as the hymn and the flag. In doing so, he emphasizes the connection between nationhood and the collective identity of Esperantists, suggesting that internationalism was initially presented as inter-nationalism, straddling the line between in-group nationalism and cosmopolitanism. He also highlights how the idea of "holy peace" in Esperanto resonated with the hope of breaking down the walls that divide various nations through a supra-national order based on a common "language of peace." In this respect, the Esperatist collective identity is described as an imagined community, leading the author to propose the term "semi-nationalism" for Esperanto's ideology and movement.

Next, Gustaf Forsell discusses how interwar Sweden's national socialists crafted and employed the concepts of a "Nordic spirit" and "race psychology" concerning their racial views of the northern Europeans. While prior research on national socialism in the Nordic countries has made substantial contributions, there remains a notable gap in understanding how these ideas were developed and applied. The author starts with a brief overview of the emergence of various race theories with particular emphasis on late-nineteenth-century Nordicism, which extolled the Nordic race as superior but endangered, with origins in the far north (Hyperborea). National socialists in the Nordic countries believed in the potential for a revolutionary racial rejuvenation leading to a racially homogeneous society, with race seen as the bedrock of social progress. Basically, Forsell focuses on two key organizations: the Manhem Society (Samfundet Manhem) and the National Socialist Workers' Party (Nationalsocialistiska Arbetarepartiet or NSAP). The Manhem Society played a pivotal role in shaping ideas of a Nordic spirit, rooted in an alternative trinitarian belief thought to be intrinsic to the Swedish people's blood and soil. The Society's ideas about the Nordic spirit were linked to attempts to purify Christianity from what was considered to be Jewish influence. These ideas were

also linked to assertions that the Old Testament was a "defiled revision" of the "Aryan-Atlantean primeval Bible." It was in this respect that the Society advocated for the Germanization of Christianity, claiming that Jesus was of Aryan descent and that Jews had falsified his teachings. On the other hand, the NSAP established in January 1933, perceived the "Nordic spirit" in relation to "Swedish-ness" through the lens of racial regeneration. This perspective emphasized the prioritization of racial survival over self-preservation and alluded to an ancestral inheritance that united biology and spirituality in each individual. The NSAP considered national socialism not merely as a political ideology but as a holistic worldview, a principle for the Nordic tribe's survival and Sweden's liberation from what they regarded as Jewish and international influences. For the NSAP, their racial conceptions of the north were integral to their vision of a national socialist society, where regenerating the Nordic race was the key path to transforming Swedish society into a national socialist state.

In his contribution, Francesco Mazzucotelli explores how the incorporation of religious imagery and vocabulary in nationalist ideology and politics serves to establish a profound connection between territory and history in Lebanon, underpinning the narrative of Lebanese independence and Lebanon's mission as the vanguard of Christianity in the Holy Land. Lebanon is conceptually framed as an integral part of a "faithscape" and a sacred geography, effectively recasting its turbulent past as a courageous history of religious resistance. Moreover, religious motifs are harnessed to legitimize political leaders, endowing them with an aura of devotion, mysticism, and at times prophetic qualities. This strategy prompts a strong sense of victimhood and martyrdom, positioning Lebanon as the national homeland of Middle Eastern Christians. Mazzucotelli further examines the transformation of fluid Ottoman millet identities into new, consolidated national allegiances. This transformation takes place through the creation of distinct "faithspaces" and the consolidation of an emotional community centered around charismatic leaders. The narrative draws parallels between notions of ascesis, suffering, and martyrdom and the history of Lebanese Christians, notably the Maronites, who are depicted as a bastion of faith continually vulnerable to subjugation and assimilation. Yet once again the synergy between nationalist and religious tropes revolves around concepts of territoriality, which is defined as the defense of land and the political utilization of geography, and belonging, realized through selective memory and the crafting of narrative arcs that involve a perceived golden era followed by decline, crisis, salvation, and rebirth. In this discourse, religiously infused symbols and images play a central role across three domains: the celebration of local geography, the celebration of local history, and the celebration of the connection between the group and its leader, thereby facilitating the creation and propagation of Christian nationalist narratives in Lebanon.

Finally, in what is the last contribution of the issue, Laszlo Hubbes deals mainly with religiousness while examining the role of "cosmic religion" in forging narratives of "new mythologies" in Hungary with nationalistic, religious, spiritual, and conspiratorial undertones. The narratives under consideration portray extraterrestrial agents as key players in the origins of the Hungarian nation, connecting the beginnings of the nation with millennial views of the future. The so-called new national mythologies hold significant relevance and influence, particularly in mystical nationalist circles in Hungary, where they have been turned into concepts

of mythic prehistory and anthropology, closely related to notions of Nordicism, Celticism, Aryanism, and Slavism. Hubbes goes on to study the transformation of national or ethnic identities through the incorporation of new forms of religiousness and religiosity, such as neopaganism, particularly ethno-paganism. New national mythologies blend elements of "cosmic religion," such as ancient aliens, extraterrestrial ancestors, and galactic saviors, with Christian apocalypticism. The resulting bricolage produces narratives of ethnogenesis and ethno-eschatology that imbue the forefathers of Hungarians with a global, colonizing, and civilizing cultural significance. The new national mythologies trace the origins of the Hungarian nation to heavenly beings or cosmic aliens, underlining a messianic eschatological mission aimed at saving mankind and emphasizing its moral and spiritual superiority over other ethnicities, cultures, and civilizations. By adapting and nationalizing alien and apocalyptic elements from global popular culture, the producers and consumers of the new national mythologies infuse their *ethnos* with cosmic significance, further strengthening their identities and narratives in a dynamic and evolving context.

Last but not least, in the heterography section, the comics artist and illustrator Giorgio Albertini represents the dialogue and clash between Judaism and Zionism, and the tension between universal and ethnic dimensions. Albertini aptly described the "ideal" Israel, but also its contradictions and mistakes. Albertini's heterography, commissioned by *Religiographies* in spring 2023, is even more relevant today, during the ongoing war in Israel and Palestine, where nationalist and religious narratives are weaponized to the detriment of humankind.

Divine Secularisation: a Possible Genealogy of Nationalism

Alberto Scigliano

Centro Studi
di Civiltà e Spiritualità
Comparate
fondazione
Giorgio Cini onlus

Alberto Scigliano
University of Turin
alberto.scigliano@unito.it

Keywords:
Nationalism, Secularisation, Netherlands, Respublica Hebraeorum, Dutch Reformed Church

To cite this:
Scigliano, Alberto. "Divine Secularisation: a Possible Genealogy of Nationalism." *Religiographies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2023): 9–19.

Abstract

This article questions the idea that secularism always comes about by the gradual elimination of the sacred from the political sphere. It also aims to discuss how in the case of seventeenth-century Netherlands, religious sentiments and an early ethnic claim participated in moulding a political regime characterised by a peculiar form of divine secularisation and by a fusion of ethnic-centred demands capable of compacting and unifying the Dutch people.

Introduction[1]

The term secularisation often refers to either the exclusion of religion from the political discourse or to the transfer of sectarian arrangements into civic religions. On the other hand, modern nationalism is generally believed to be born out of secularist arguments, as the merging of identitarian claims with religious formulas.[2] We often read that the seventeenth century was characterised by a progressive removal of religion from the public sphere and that it was during this time that the emerging core of modern statehood and its civic discourse had begun to replace medieval political theology.[3] However, my argument is that this vision is too naive and schematic and that in, some cases, religion nourished a peculiar form of secularisation.[4] In this paper, I offer a new account of the path that nationalism can take. What may be defined as proto-nationalism and the alleged undermining of religion that occurred during the course of seventeenth century were not a product of rising secularisation but rather the outcome of the most theologised century of the modern era.

The idea of a contrast between the religious and the civil sphere that had allegedly started in the eleventh century has already been questioned by legal scholar Harold Berman, who distinguishes between a tentative "first secularisation" that occurred during the Middle Ages and what he called the "spiritualisation of the secular" of early modernity.[5]

To support this argument, which takes Berman's conceptual itinerary a step further, I will start by investigating the case of the Republic of the Seven United Provinces in the Low Countries, which formed after the Dutch Revolt of 1566–1648. I will show how the creation of a national myth, that of the Batavi, laid the foundations for the first true ethnic claim in history. My analysis also looks at how Reformation's Hebraist erudition, as it developed during the struggle against Spanish King Philip II, claimed

1
I would like to thank Dr. Maddalena Chiellini for her review work on this article.

2
Ermanno Arrigoni, *Alle radici della secolarizzazione: La teologia di Gogarten* (Torino: Marietti, 1981), 9–39; Carl Schmitt, "Teologia politica: Quattro capitoli sulla dottrina della sovranità," in C. Schmitt, *Le categorie del politico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1972), 61–74; Eric Maulin, *La Politica e il Sacro: I fondamenti teologici del pensiero politico europeo* (Napoli: Diana Edizioni, 2021), 14.

3
Roberto Lambertini and Mario Conetti, *Il potere al plurale: Un profilo di storia del pensiero politico medievale* (Milano: Jouvence, 2019), 102–3, 156–58.

4
See Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), exposing the religious roots of the ostensibly secular age to this day.

5
Harold J. Berman, "The Spiritualization of Secular Law: The Impact of Reformation," *Journal of Law and Religion* 14 (1999–2000): 313–49.

that Moses' biblical constitution considered religious and civil laws to be on the same plane. In conclusion, I argue that what we see in the Netherlands is not one of the first examples of what Carl Schmitt referred to when he talked about how "all significant concepts of the modern theories of the state are secularised theological concepts."[6] Rather, we witness a religious practice that is also nationalist-like, civic, and state-centred. To some extent, seventeenth-century Dutch Calvinist theology, national claims, and the coeval Political Hebraism[7] combined to produce a sort of divine secularism, something that might still come as a surprise.

The first empirical data we can look at is how in Romance languages we can find different shades of the adjective "secular." Words like *laicità* or *laïcité* in Italian and French, or *laicismo* in Spanish imply distance from a religious sphere. The general notion of secularism was also expressed by removing God from public space. Nevertheless, in seventeenth-century Netherlands, people understood secularism differently. The Dutch Reformed political discourse saw the relationship between sacred history and human history as continuous and blended, rather than conflicting.[8] Even the term "rebel," in reference to the Dutch provinces fighting the Spanish central government, denoted a certain ambiguity. According to both sides of the conflict, while the word had a political connotation, a rebel was also a deviant of all sorts, including from a religious perspective,[9] as religion marked out and conceptualised the political side of the conflict of the revolt. The divine benevolence accorded to one of the struggling parties was demonstrated by emerging victorious, as in the eyes of Reformed scholars and theologians, historical development could only be understood through the Holy Scriptures. Thus, the Calvinist perspective would interpret the long history of Dutch people through the lens of biblical events,[10] as long as their religious sentiment was preserved.

In this respect, if in today's analysis we keep these aspects separate, while they were instead closely linked at the time, we would be implying and anticipating that long process of contemporary secularisation, which, perhaps, had not even begun at the time.[11] The requests of Dutch Calvinist congregations permeated the political affairs of the state, especially at a local level. Dutch civil authorities were well aware that they could not rule without heeding the opinions of the *predikanten* (preachers).[12] In fact, during their theological training, young Dutch scholars and ministers learned to provide political responses in line with the language and mindset of their time. As a consequence, the substantial support for the intermingling of state and religion, widely demonstrated by these Dutch theologians, implied a defence of the political stability of the fledgling Dutch "rebel" Republic, as well as a gradual reflection, undertaken by Calvinist theologians such as Gijsbert Voet (1589–1676), on an embryonic idea of territorial and *national* sovereignty.[13]

From the point of view of the most uncompromising Dutch Calvinist scholars, both political and moral freedom constituted one of the main aspects—if not *the* main aspect—of national integrity. Thus, reluctance to tolerate denominational variations other than the rigorous Calvinist one is easy to understand. A wide array of Calvinist theologians objected to religious tolerance, believing that it would undermine the strength inherent to the power required to rule the new state. In these Calvinist theories, the Netherlands were linked to a single faith, and Dutch people were political extensions of a religious doctrine that summarised the concept underlying the Revolt. If both the Republic of the United Provinces and the

6
Schmitt, *Teologia politica*, 61.

7
See Fania Oz-Salzberger, "Political Hebraism: Past and Present," in *The Liberal-Republican Quandary in Israel, Europe and the United States: Early Modern Thought Meets Current Affairs*, ed. T. Maissen and F. Oz-Salzberger (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 30–48.

8
See Johannes Hoornbeeck, *Oratio de Studio S.S. Theologiae* (Ultrajecti: Apud Iannem à Waesberge, 1644), 12; Richard A. Muller, "Calvin and the Calvinists: Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities Between the Reformation and Orthodoxy," *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995): 345–75.

9
Rosario Villari, *Politica barocca: Inquietudini, mutamento e prudenza* (Bari: Laterza, 2010), 100.

10
See Aaron Katchen, *Christian Hebraists and Dutch Rabbis: Seventeenth Century Apologetics and the Study of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

11
Lea Campos Boralevi, "La politeia biblica nel pensiero politico dell'Europa moderna," in *Alterità. Esperienze e percorsi nell'Europa moderna*, ed. L. Felici (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2014), 12.

12
Johan Huizinga, *La civiltà olandese del Seicento* (Torino: Einaudi, 1979), 47.

13
Gisbertus Voetius, *Selectarum disputationum Theologicarum, Liber II* (Ultrajecti: Apud Joannem à Waesberge, 1648), 791–826.

entire Dutch nation had departed from a self-identification with Calvinism (which was anti-Socinian and anti-Arminian), they would have renounced the reasons for their historical existence.[14]

People and religion: from the Batavi to the Israelites

As can be imagined, the inevitable internal contrasts amongst the various reformed confessions of the Dutch Republic grew entwined with an internecine conflict, which threatened the stability of the Netherlands from within. It should be remembered that the dispute between the Gomarists, followers of Franciscus Gomarus (1563–1641), and the Arminians, Jacob Arminus' supporters (1560–1609), on the question of the authority of religion over politics divided Dutch people deeply. With city against city, congregation against congregation, and university against university, the underdeveloped Dutch political entity was poised to be disintegrated by centrifugal forces.[15] Due to these controversies, Dutch thinkers advocated for the implementation of a common identity policy to find a pacifying solution to a sectarian disagreement that was tearing Dutch society apart. This necessity eventually developed into two parallel public discourses, the first of which concerned the proto-nationalist and ethnic rhetoric of Batavian genealogy.

In order to trace the Batavian myth, we need to go back to the work of ancient Roman historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus, who was probably the first to mention the Batavi in his treatises. In one of his first writings, *Germania*, composed around AD 98, Tacitus first discussed this Germanic people, one of the feuding tribes living in today's Netherlands. In Books IV and V of his *Historia*, the Roman historian described the revolt of this unruly tribe against Roman legions in AD 69–70, inspired and led by their warrior leader Claudius Civilis.

Ideas about the Dutch nation pivoted around this line of direct descent from the ancient Batavi, who at the time had also fought against foreign invaders. Now the vehement and greedy Romans had been substituted by the insidious and opulent Catholics, enemies of the true Christian faith.

This identity rhetoric, which foreshadowed the historical or pseudo-historical identifications of Romanticism, whilst it essentially imagined an ideal continuity between the Republic of the United Provinces and the Batavi, clearly sought to overcome the disagreements that pitted large groups within Dutch society against each other. The first author to delve into a political and nationalist-like narrative of the Batavian myth was Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). In his *Liber de antiquitate reipublicae Batavicae*, also published in Dutch as *Tractaet van de Oudtheyt van de Batavische nu Hollandsghe Republique* (1610), Grotius, whose Calvinist views were similar to those of Arminius, stated that freedom, unity, endurance, and independence were central characteristics of the Dutch national identity. He actively argued that they made up the most native essence of the Dutch people, and he called on the Dutch nation to preserve these ancient and unitary traditions.[16] To hold Dutch society together, the Stadtholders thus encouraged the spread of this Batavian heritage and the idea of a libertarian nation that resisted Latin colonisation.[17] On these grounds, Amsterdam-born poet Johan van Heemskerck (1597–1656) wrote the popular poem *Inleydinghe tot het ontwerp van een Batavische Arcadia* (i.e., Introduction to the idea of a Batavian Arcadia, 1637). The text described a trip from The Hague to the seaside town of Katwijk, where a group of nymphs

14
See Joris van Eijnatten, "Religionis Causa: Moral Theology and the Concept of Holy War in the Dutch Republic," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 24 (2006): 609–35.

15
See James Tanis, "Reformed Pietism and Protestant Missions," *Harvard Theological Review* 67 (1974): 68.

16
See Annabel Brett, "Natural Right and Civil Community: The Civil Philosophy of Hugo Grotius," *The Historical Journal* 1 (2002): 31–51.

17
Jeroen Dewulf, *Spirit of Resistance: Dutch Clandestine Literature During the Nazi Occupation* (New York: Camden House, 2010), 102–3.

and shepherds peacefully and joyfully conversed in a courteous and idyllic atmosphere. Later, playwright Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679) used Heemskerck's theme for his famous play *Batavische gebroeders* (i.e., Batavian brothers, 1663), which again highlighted the tight connection between the fierce Batavi and the proud Dutch people.

If the Batavian myth played a major role in the Dutch seventeenth-century imagination,[18] a second public discourse derived from the emphasis the Reformists put on the rediscovery and reading of original biblical sources. In this process of national definition, the new Dutch subjects also sought their roots in identifying as a true and solely biblical nation. This created an additional level of moral contrast with Catholic Spain, depicted as a pharaonic tyranny that opposed the legitimate struggle of the Netherlands for civic and religious freedom. Spanish monarch Philip II was associated with the anonymous biblical pharaoh, whilst the Dutch people were associated with the Israelites. For example, the rescue of the citizens of Leiden in 1574 by the Dutch Navy was linked to the events narrated in Exodus (Ex. 13:18 and 14:24–29), when the Egyptians were overwhelmed by the sea. Leiden's rescue was seen as the divine endorsement of the true faith, and the indication of God's closeness to the resistance of the Netherlands. The episode, both the historical and the biblical one, galvanised the Dutch ruling class so strongly that it grew into a real national iconographic motif, with dozens of artistic representations being made.[19]

With a domino effect, it was almost natural for religious discussions to move on to an external political debate. Despite their religious differences, all the Reformed scholars noted that the Hebrew Bible also dealt with politics and the organisation of power. Prominent Dutch Calvinist theologian Sixtinus Amama (1593–1629) was convinced that the principles of the Reformation favoured the study of Hebrew in order to defeat the Catholic threat.[20] Reformed theologians were interested in deciphering, understanding, and investigating the politics described in the Bible, the kind of organisation of power that God legitimated, and what kind of regulations Moses implemented. Thus, seventeenth-century scholarship witnessed the dissemination of books and treatises that explored the so-called *Respublica Hebraeorum*—the ancient Hebrew Commonwealth—following this fresh Reformed interest. Jewish sources were becoming a vessel of political norms which God himself had provided to the Israelites in the form of a civic government. And Moses in particular, as the Israelite lawgiver, was represented as the founder of this ancient government. It is clear that the consequences of such a "secular" reinterpretation of the Bible were quite relevant: if God had depicted a typology of civil government, then the aims of a true Christian nation would have to be entirely re-organised.

This context is crucial for understanding the trends emerging in this period. It explains why Arminian Calvinist Petrus Cunaeus (1586–1638) in his *De Republica Hebraeorum Libri III* (1617) attempted to demonstrate the free, orderly, and victorious character of Mosaic law. In other words, he tried to provide a civic-religious model for the new Dutch state, capable of mediating between the rashness of the Exodus events and the political stability of the biblical Commonwealth.[21] Thus, the classical republican word *libertas* became the distinctive Dutch *Vrijheid*, nourished by biblical, Jewish, and Latin sources, fusing into a political discourse that used terms of classical antiquity, but with a much wider conceptual range. Moreover, the Hebrew commonwealth provided not only biblical parallels of a chosen people and a promised land, but also a confederal blueprint for the

18
Simon Schama, *The Embarassment of Riches: An Interpetation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988), 78.

19
Steven Nadler, *Gli ebrei di Rembrandt* (Torino: Einaudi, 2017), 112–13.

20
Peter T. van Rooden, *Theology, Biblical Scholarship and Rabbinical Studies in the Seventeenth Century: Constantijn L'Empereur (1591–1648), Professor of Hebrew and Theology at Leiden* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 69–70.

21
See Lea Campos Boralevi, "La Respublica Hebraeorum nella tradizione olandese," in *Politeia Biblica*, ed. L. Campos Boralevi and D. Quaglioni (Firenze: Olschki, 2003), 431–63.

organisation of the Republic of United Provinces.[22] Being tied to a biblical imagery also entailed continuous references to the Jewish notion of *berith* (i.e., the Covenant) between God and Israel. The covenant mediated by Moses was referred to because it possessed a moral strength that could bring Hollanders together thanks to its religious nature, which was being absorbed in the civic amalgamation process being undergone by the Dutch Republic.[23] Biblical references, through the only official Dutch translation of the Bible, the *Statenbijbel,* allowed Calvinist preachers to become political agitators of sorts in the service of the state. Likewise, Dutch intelligentsia received and reworked these ideas within their cultural and intellectual activities, trying to make the Republic of the Seven United Provinces appear as if it belonged to both past and present republican regimes. The Hebrew model was efficaciously inserted amongst other similar or compatible models, such as Geneva's (or the Swiss model), Venice's,[24] and that of the Germanic *mixtae* republics.[25] Reformed scholars looked at the supposed Constitution conceived by the Holy Scriptures as a beacon leading the Dutch nation to its historical destiny. Thus, Political Theory—or its forefather at least—worked alongside Hebraist scholarship, Batavian myth, and Calvinist theology[26] to produce a Dutch national identity.

The unifying character of the identification between the Netherlands and ancient Israel was also due to the decisive role played by the ruling class, which was able to accentuate the notably political and national nature of Israelite religious identification. This occurred thanks to an accurate political project developed in the Calvinist circles of academic Hebraists, through which this narration was consciously transformed into a republican Calvinist political model, based on a deep knowledge of Jewish scholarship.[27]

During the period between the Revolt and the affirmation of the state, the nationalist discourse of the Dutch as a chosen people retaining a special destiny was oriented towards a reinterpretation of Old Testament politics. The political use of the Bible began when biblical pages were presented as sources to examine and reassess the central themes for the construction of Dutch political identity. This was brought into being not only by theologians and scholars, but also by the Republic's new generation of politicians. Essentially, civil authorities were also interested in creating and legitimising their own identity agenda through a "secular" reading of the Old Testament.

It is no coincidence then that some Calvinist scholars stressed the centrality of the notion of alliance (*berith*) for the nation. According to them, the book of Deuteronomy warned the Israelites not to embrace foreign idols, since Israel was born as a nation and acquired its national freedom thanks to the political-religious alliance stipulated by Moses. In the same way, all Dutch people were collectively called to defend their Republic as the Israelites did, in its dual form of political affiliation and religious faith.[28]

A divine secularisation

Despite the scholarly definitions of secularism, Dutch theologians generally claimed that religious semantic contents could have an intrinsic value for the public discourse. This reading, built on the Old Testament as brokered by the Reformation, believed that the Dutch were the chosen people, bound to God—and to themselves—by a sacred covenant, and associated the Low

22
Helmut G. Koenigsberger, *Monarchies, States Generals and Parliaments: The Netherlands in Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 241–321.

23
Daniel J. Elazar, *Covenant and Commonwealth: From Christian Separation through the Protestant Reformation* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1–3.

24
See Lea Campos Boralevi, "Classical Foundational Myths of European Republicanism: The Jewish Commonwealth," in *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, ed. M. Van Gelderen and Q. Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 253–55.

25
Martin Van Gelderen, "Aristotelians, Monarchomachs and Republicans: Sovereignity and Respublica Mixta in Dutch and German Political Thought, 1580–1650," in *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, 197.

26
Jonathan Jacobs, "Return to the Sources: Political Hebraism and the Making of Modern Politics," *Hebraic Political Studies* 3 (2006): 336–37.

27
See Lea Campos Boralevi, "Linguaggio biblico e repubblica ebraica nell'Olanda del Cinque e Seicento," in P. Cunaeus, *De Republica Hebraeorum—The Commonwealth of the Jews* (Firenze: Centro Editoriale Toscano, 1996).

28
Alberto Scigliano, "Johannes Hoornbeeck, la Nadere Reformatie e lo ius ad bellum: Un percorso fra calvinismo ortodosso ed erudizione ebraica nell'Olanda di metà Seicento," *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 1 (2022): 114–16.

Countries with a Netherlandish Israel. Through the use of these semantic tools, Dutch thinkers justified the revolt against King Philip II, as well as against Catholic rule over their Reformed land. As mentioned above, during the Eighty Years' War there was an abiding comparison between the institutions of the regime of the biblical Hebrews and the structures of the Dutch state, as an outcome of its full identification as the "new Israel."[29] The Bible was read as a source of inspiration for a new political project, as well as a good compendium of ethical-political patterns, and it was a privileged conceptual provider for the development of political thought in early modern Holland.[30] Within the newborn country, this political Hebraism was not limited to the religious realm but was even diffused into popular strata. In this context, the divine view of the nation was a crucial political and cultural theme, capable of calling into question some historiographical beliefs concerning European political thought, such as those concerning progressive secularisation, which is often overly backdated.[31] Large parts of Dutch society were aware of this ideological overlap between divine history and their secular reality, whereas secular just meant "civic affairs" for them.

Lectures and sermons preached by pastors or scholarly theologians illustrated how civil life was to be a mirror of religious existence. This did not entail that one's public life had to be identical to one's spiritual vigour, but rather that the rules that ordered and defined religion were a *starting point* for public affairs. In fact, during the Dutch Revolt, and in its governmental outcome, we can actually observe a sacred, divine secularism. The Dutch case showed that the nationalisation of society and the affirmation of a political or civic language could have a double relationship on two different levels, in which daily affairs, as well as the affairs of the state itself, were subject to very little "secular" reading.

Since God and Moses had politically ordered ancient Israel through a mix of the civic and the religious, from which it would be wise to draw inspiration, the separation between these two spheres lost any solid foundation. Civic politics, war politics, and even identity politics then appeared as an aspect of an all-embracing *national* religious culture. In the eyes of Dutch Calvinist scholars, the biblical paradigm was so rich in ethical and civil significance that it could teach one how to be at the same time a citizen (a good *burger*) and a subject (*onderdaan*) of the Dutch nation.

As Michael Walzer demonstrated almost forty years ago, the paradigm of the Jewish Exodus served as a point of reference not only for the rebellious Dutchmen, but also in the English Civil War.[32] It is an extremely tangible and dynamic paradigm that could even appear dangerously subversive to the most traditionalist theologians. For this reason, the Dutch ruling class intended to elaborate the national idea of freedom in parallel with Mosaic liberation, but in a less seditious way, not just through the use of classical models, but also by employing more institutionalising biblical paradigms. References to the Bible therefore take care to not exalt too much the libertarian thrust of the Israelites fleeing Egypt, focusing instead on the perfect and prudential nature of Mosaic law, at the same time civil and cultic. The conception of the state became a reflection of both morality (religion) and nation (civil affairs). These three elements—state, nation, and ethics—were merged together, without sharp boundaries.

In seventeenth-century Dutch mentality, secularisation, intended as the absence of religion in civil affairs, was disarmed by the profound interconnection between nation-centred and civil elements. Civil authorities administered the state in the interests of the Dutch people and of

29
Miriam Bodian, "The Biblic Jewish Republic and the Dutch New Israel in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Thought," *Hebraic Political Studies* 2 (2006): 186–202.

30
See Jetze Touber, *Spinoza and Biblical Philology in the Dutch Republic, 1660–1710* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 177–226.

31
See Debora Spini, "Il calvinismo alle radici della modernità," in *Calvino e calvinismo politico*, ed. C. Maladrino and L. Savarino (Torino: Claudiana, 2011), 310–16.

32
Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

their religion. Just as Moses ordered an alliance between Israel and God via the establishment of a religious and civil corpus, the divine secularisation of the Netherlands introduced a hybrid alliance between sacredness and politics in the civil sphere. Civil authorities understood that Calvinist sentiment had public significance for the Dutch national community and thus incorporated some religious directives, while at the same time they did not bow blindly to the theologians' will.[33]

From this perspective, secular politics was neither the means nor the aim of religion but participated in the fabrication of an unprecedented national and state entity. Calvinism was not a civic religion—certainly not in Enlightenment or Jacobin terms—but it represented the public ethics of a new nation, and the reason for its existence on the stage of human history. The Calvinist creed acted as glue and justification for the national struggles of the entire Dutch state. From a nationalistic point of view, Calvinism and its two ramifications—the biblical and the Batavian—created an "us" opposed to a "them."

It is remarkable that there were also signs of a relative convergence in terms of a dialogical standpoint that moved away both from Medieval political theology and present-day, clear-cut notions of secularism. As a matter of fact, the Dutch example highlights a narrow transition in the definition of political legitimacy, which does not rest on divine will as in the Middle Ages, but on the *religious* will of people who recognised themselves as a nation. In the Netherlands the famous motto *cuius regio, eius religio*—"whose realm, their religion"—was overturned. It was not the sovereign imposing their belief on the people, but the people who, through the majority religion, built their own identification with the state. Civic institutions were therefore ordered and inspired by this majority rather than absolutist principles. This under-studied aspect of seventeenth-century Dutch society cannot be ignored when studying how secularism eventually became embedded with concepts such as democracy, liberalism, and the rule of law.[34] It is also worth noting that the first theorist of natural law was moderate Calvinist Hugo Grotius, the same person who had written the first apologetic treatise on the Batavi. Some authors have argued that many of the central ideas we unwittingly associate with the birth of modern political thought, or the birth of so-called secularisation, developed in this religious context.[35] While historical studies seem to trace the tendency of seventeenth-century political thought to claim absolute autonomy, in the Dutch case, things went in a different and clear direction. Between the 1620s and the 1660s, the Dutch political debate had increasingly been dominated by a concern with the ideas of Niccolò Machiavelli. The Italian theorist had been the first writer to offer a vision of politics in which theology did not play a part in providing political legitimacy and stability.[36] His essentially secular vision of history influenced the works of some Dutch thinkers of the time, such as Pieter de la Court (1618–1685)[37] and Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677). Without getting into the specifics of these Dutch authors, we can still say that Machiavelli's vision could thrive in a wartime context—as Holland was experiencing in that period—since the pursuit of theological disputes felt devoid of any real political and social relevance. The previous 1617–1618 crisis had brought the Republic to the brink of civil war. That had encouraged civil authorities, albeit more or less linked to religious circles, to take matters into their own hands and curb the internal strife by using the Batavian narrative and, to a slightly lesser extent, biblical identification. Taking control of religious institutions

33
Huizinga, *La civiltà olandese del Seicento*, 54–55.

34
See for example Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 88–136.

35
Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic*, 134–37.

36
See Eco O. G. Haitsma Mulier, *The Myth of Venice and Dutch Republican Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1980), 170–212.

37
See Arthur Weststeijn, *Commercial republicanism in the Dutch Golden Age: The Political Thought of Johan & Pieter de la Court* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

did not imply a process of secularisation intended as the exclusion of the religious from the political, but rather the maintenance of state stability and public order through the fusion of the two. Civil magistracies, more concerned with the collapse of the Dutch Republic under the disruptive power of sectarian diatribes, mediated and negotiated between the two fields. Hugo Grotius explained this well. He started the Batavian myth, while also being a theologian, a politician, and a jurist. In addition to his profound interest in the mythical past of the Batavi, Grotius believed that the divine constitution preserved in the Bible was the political cynosure towards which Holland should navigate.[38] Ethnic political semantics and religious political semantics thus merged into an intellectual product that saw the Dutch Republic as both a civil and God-inspired political expression. In a certain sense, both visions sacralised the political sphere, reframing in the present the ultimate goal of religion: salvation. But if Calvinism aimed at the salvation of the soul—which in some cases was also predestined for salvation—the nationalist claim aimed at the salvation of the Dutch citizens, who had to be self-aware and fight for the defense of their hard-gained freedom.

In seventeenth-century Holland, it was not only the theologians who interpreted the Scriptures, just like political jurists did not simply theorise the workings of civil authority. Moreover, as noted by Jonathan I. Israel, political stability in the Republic of the United Provinces was a crucial necessity after the Twelve Years' Truce, which had been "secular"—or civic—in character, even though constantly sporting theological themes. The urgent need for peace tended to give less importance to theological claims and arguments.[39]

For this reason, divine secularisation was not a *subordination* of religion to politics, but rather their fusion or juxtaposition, for the sake of the state and national unity. While it might be believed that modern states and their administrative apparatus have come to be the way they are due to the religious sphere, which is partly true in some cases, the imposition of a religious peace and the intervention of a mixed authority, as occurred in the Netherlands, was the peculiar compromise between religion and politics in which the civic realm was sacralised and the religious context was politicised.

In early modern absolute monarchies, the king had a divine right: his *potestas* was not mediated by the people, and his authority could only be limited by divine laws. In a sense, loyalty to the monarch is prone to be transformed into a political religion. The greatness of God is reflected in the majesty of the sovereign, to whom the people must swear eternal fidelity as the highest religious manifestation. However, the Dutch case demonstrates how loyalty can be directed towards the nation itself. State apparatus, the Batavian nation, Israelite identification, and Calvinist confession were the archetypes to which Dutch citizens had to turn to assert their loyalty. Thus, divine secularisation can be defined as a hybrid form, in which both Calvinist theological readings and national awareness of the Dutch state coexisted. The relationship between these two perspectives was not in conflict but rather in perennial osmosis, through the political reification of updated and re-functionalised biblical suggestions and of a mythical past. Historiography has sometimes offered a schematic picture that does not correspond to the reality of all the contexts, especially when it comes to the Netherlands, which were actually robustly penetrated by religiosity and mysticism.

38
Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic*, 98–99.

39
Jonathan I. Israel, "The Uses of Myth and History in the Ideological Politics of the Dutch Golden Age," in *Narratives of Low Countries History and Culture: Reframing the Past*, ed. J. Fenoulhet and L. Gilbert (London: UCL Press, 2016), 10.

If we eliminate the religious and mystical dimension, the idea of an absolute secular language of civic Humanism would imply refusing a whole world of meaning connected to the pervasive influence of theology, biblical exegesis, and prophecy. Accordingly, the biblical-political themes of the Exodus, of the liberation from tyranny, and of political resistance based on religious obedience were crucial during the Dutch Revolt and in the political and nationalistic creation of the United Provinces. That is why the union between Batavi and Israelites influenced the Dutch art of the Golden Age, repurposing visual representations centred on the "national" hero Moses, on Batavian ancestors and on the antagonist, the Pharaoh.

For this reason, my definition of divine secularisation concerns the periodisation and the relationship between theology and politics, and this led me to question why the Jewish Commonwealth model became, for example, a republican political model that enjoyed great popularity in seventeenth-century Europe. The Dutch case led to one of the first instances of nationalism, but also a nationalism resulting from a process of divine secularisation, within which Calvinist theology, with its attachment to Jewish scholarship, served a basic function in the distinctive formation of Dutch civic identity.

Seventeenth-century divine secularisation of Dutch politics marked a moment in history in which Christianity had partly lost its social structuring function, typical of the Middle Ages, but at the same time could still use its narrative force to build a new active political reality. Ethnic claims and the civil government participated on the same level in the aspirations of religious belief. Religion did not disappear, but at the same time the Dutch state was not confessional either, nor was faith an exclusively private phenomenon.

The Batavian narrative allowed the Dutch Republic's thinkers and ruling class to shape the mythopoeia of their nation by providing a mythical past. This was a compelling narrative of the Netherlands as a political and cultural community united not only against a foreign tyranny, but also in achieving a religious pacification and a collective destiny. In this sense, King Philip II, as a Spaniard and Catholic, could be, all in all, the only enemy capable of compacting and uniting the mottled fringes of Dutch Calvinism against a common threat.

Conclusions

In conclusion, at the beginning of the modern age, when ethnic constructions became part of a broader process of identity awakening, some political myths certainly served to legitimise new or existing institutions, to galvanise public opinion, and to strengthen collective identification. This is why I believe that we should address the question of whether nationalism is an exclusive product of the processes of popular political participation and industrialisation after the eighteenth century. We should overturn this perspective and rethink the history of nationalisms as preceding the ideological constructions of the Enlightenment and of the Liberal and Romantic eras.

As for the Dutch case, Calvinists did not ask Dutch society for a clear separation between religious faith and public life, nor for a total penetration of the cult within the civic sphere. The Republic was not an end in itself, just as religion was not an end in itself. The reality that their juncture created was instead an end in itself. The solution civil and religious authorities found was pragmatic, and it aimed at the hybridisation of the

two realms, occurring with the inclusion of the preachers in the government of communities and a state that took the moral constructions of religion into account. The Calvinist approach, along with civil authorities, promoted a nationalist cooperation that did not separate one sphere from another. In a sense, it was rather aimed at incorporating dissident religious groups in the fabric of the political body in order to contain centrifugal forces and to stabilise the Netherlands on its path to full independence.

Additionally, thanks to the incessant work of Dutch Reformed theologians, it became common in the Netherlands to think that religion could mould customs and shape the intimate beliefs of the political community of citizens, while mitigating the excesses of a society that prospered greatly during its seventeenth-century Golden Age.[40] Only through this interpretation is it possible to grasp the key role of the Dutch foundational myth and its relationship with biblical identification, tied as both elements are to the phenomenon of divine secularisation.

40
Maurizio Viroli, *Come se Dio ci fosse: Religione e libertà nella storia d'Italia* (Torino: Einaudi 2009), 150; Martin H. Prozersky, "The Emergence of Dutch Pietism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 2 (1977): 29–30.

Sacralising the Greek Revolution

Marios Hatzopoulos

Centro Studi
di Civiltà e Spiritualità
Comparate
fondazione
Giorgio Cini onlus

Marios Hatzopoulos
University of Nicosia
hatzopoulos.m@unic.ac.cy

Keywords:
Nationalism, Secularization, Revolution, War, Resurrection/Regeneration, Religion, Performance, Ceremony, Ritual

To cite this:
Hatzopoulos, Marios. "Sacralising the Greek Revolution." *Religiographies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2023): 20–37.

Abstract

Treating nationalism as a profoundly anticlerical and secular ideology, Greek historians tend to emphasize the role of the Greek Enlightenment in enabling the detachment of educated Greeks from religious values and practices, facilitating the spread of national identity among the mass and, ultimately, effecting the outbreak of the Greek Revolution in 1821. This paper argues, on the contrary, that the clash of religious and secular ideas in pre-war Greek society did not usher in a massive detachment from religious values and practices. As the glory of Hellas waxed in Greek hearts and minds, collective attachments to a past steeped in religion did not wane; rather, the two often overlapped and reinforced each other, especially after the commencement of the war. The focus, therefore, is set on the process of imbrication between nationalism and religion as a binary process that affects and transforms both as a result of active confrontation of the Muslim Ottomans as enemies. Besides the constitutional tie between nationality and faith, several other means of sacralising the revolutionary war are considered depending on agency and circumstance: religiously induced violence, modes of ceremony and ritual focused on veneration and mass reverence, production of new religious literature adjusted to war purposes, action on days of religious significance, religious rites and celebrations for patriotic purposes, transfer of religious practices (hymn chanting) and concepts (martyrdom) to the war culture and, finally, the quasi-sanctification of the bodies of the fallen patriots.

Whether nations retained a religious marker of identity or rejected it depended on whether they had emerged in conflict with religion or in alliance with it.

David Martin*

The Greek enlightenment emerged as a movement aimed at spreading the values and ideas of the Enlightenment to the Balkans in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The movement led to the adoption of modern concepts like political classicism and revolutionary nationalism by the Ottoman-ruled Orthodox communities of South-Eastern Europe. Increased interest in things purely secular—schooling, revolutionary liberalism, freemasonry networks and, finally, a severe economic crisis in Ottoman trade after 1815—resulted in a massive armed insurrection against the Sultan that broke out in the early months of 1821, first in the Danubian Principalities (modern-day Romania) and then further south, in mainland Greece and the islands. The ensuing war was practically unrelated to religion. The Greek Revolution was a national revolution that put forward the sovereignty of a people from a secular viewpoint. Endemic religious indifference in wartime aided the post-war endeavour to establish an autonomous state and an autocephalous national church subordinate to the values of Hellenism. In broad terms, this is today the mainstream view of historians on the rise and early development of Greek nationalism, whose secularist bias often obscures interesting connections and affinities with religion.

* David Martin, "What I really said about secularization," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 46, no. 2 (2007): 142, cited in Effie Fokas, "David Martin on Religion and Nationalism: Navigator of Contested Territories," *Nations and Nationalism* 27, no. 11 (2021): 11.

This line of reasoning was laid down in Greece and abroad by a new wave of historians working on modern Greek history in the 1970s and 1980s. The new wave consisted mainly, though not exclusively, of students of Konstantinos Th. Dimaras, a literature historian who had made the Greek Enlightenment the focal point of his research.[1] The circle of Dimaras disentangled Greek nationalism and national identity from religion, setting the standards of what nowadays is widely accepted in Greek historiography: the movement of the Greek Enlightenment was instrumental in the gradual detachment of educated individuals and groups from religious values and practices, and the clash between religious and secular ideas facilitated the spread of national identity among the Ottoman-ruled Greeks, effecting thus the outbreak of 1821.[2] This is a view that presupposes and stems from, whether explicitly or tacitly, what Anthony Smith has called the secular replacement thesis.[3] According to this thesis, religion is a residual phenomenon and a background category in the analysis of a given nationalism, "representing that from which, and against which, nations and nationalism emerged."[4] As the legitimate offspring of the Enlightenment, nationalism is a profoundly anticlerical and secular ideology meant to replace religion in the modern world, as are national identities. It is for this reason that religion, and more broadly the sacred, cannot account for the origins and development of a given national identity and movement. In respect to the Greek case, for instance, it has been suggested that "religion came last in the struggle to forge new national identities and did not become a functional element in national definition until the nation-states had nationalised their churches."[5]

This paper takes a different stance. There is no doubt that the Greek Revolution or War of Independence (1821–1830)[6] stemmed from the dynamics of Western thought and practice, that it disrupted the Ottoman order of power and hastened the diffusion of secular ideas in the Balkans, yet at the same time, it had been a fascinating mélange of traditional and modern elements, old identities and modern concepts. As the glory of Hellas waxed in Greek hearts and minds, attachments to a past steeped in religion did not wane. On the contrary, the two often overlapped and reinforced each other, especially after the war broke out. The secular replacement thesis, therefore, on which most historians of Modern Greece nowadays rely, does not apply to the Greek case,[7] if it applies to any case at all.[8]

By arguing thus I do not contend that the Orthodox Church had been the guardian of Greek ethnicity and nationhood during the period of the Ottoman rule, nor that it effected the Greek War of Independence. The thesis of the Church-led reawakening of the Greek people after four centuries of Ottoman domination,[9] which informs older works on 1821 (mostly in Greek), lacks validity by modern historiographical standards. My approach stems from two premises, one theoretical and the other empirical. At a theoretical level, I accept Anthony Smith's view of nationalism as a modern ideology and movement which, nonetheless, draws on pre-modern symbols and myths, in order to furnish powerful and compelling imagery and language, generate new modes of imaginings, and construct firm social and political relationships.[10] Religious heritage, text and image are very important in this respect. The notion of divine election of a certain people, the theme of collective regeneration, the belief in the coming of a messiah-saviour, and the idea of overcoming death through self-sacrifice came straight from the sphere of religion to become a staple of nineteenth-century nationalist thinking in Europe and

1
Konstantinos Th. Dimaras, *Neoellinikos Diaphotismos* (Athens: Ermis, 1993), french edition: C. Th. Dimaras, *La Gréce au temps de Lumiéres* (Geneva: Droz, 1969). Thereon see further, Effi Gazi, "Revisiting Religion and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Greece," in *The Making of Modern Greece*, ed. Roderick Beaton and David Ricks (London: Ashgate, 2009), 96. Cf. also, Antonis Liakos, *O ellinikos 20os aionas* (Athens: Polis, 2019), 648, english edition: *The Edinburgh History of the Greeks, 1909 to 2012: A Transnational History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

2
See for example, Philippos Eliou, *Tyfloson Kyrie ton laon sou. Oi proepanastatikes kriseis kai o Nikolaos Pikkolos* (Athens: Poreia, 1988 [first published 1974]); Alkis Angelou, *Ton Photon. Opseis tou Neoellinikou Diaphotismon* (vol. 1, Athens: Ermis, 1988), (vol. 2, Athens: MIET 1999). English-speaking literature on the birth of Modern Greece reflects also this perspective; see for instance, Richard Clogg, ed., *The Struggle for Greek Independence: Essays to Mark the 150th Anniversary of the Greek War of Independence* (London: Macmillan, 1973) and Paschalis Kitromilides's renowned PhD diss. (Harvard University, 1978), later reprinted as *Enlightenment and Revolution: The Making of Modern Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). Dimaras's thesis on secularism and the Greek Enlightenment has not ceased to exert a strong influence on contemporary Greek historians. See quite indicatively: John Koliopoulos and Thanos Veremis, *Greece: The Modern Sequel. From 1831 to the Present* (London: Hurst, 2002); Nikos Theotokas and Nikos Kotaridis, *I oikonomia tis vias. Paradosiakes kai neoterikes exousies stin ellada tou 19ou aiona* (Athens: Vivliorama, 2006); Vasilis Kremmydas, *I elliniki epanastasi tou 1821. Tekmiria, anapsilafiseis, emineies* (Athens: Gutenberg, 2016); Petros T. Pizanias, *The Making of the Modern Greeks, 1400–1820* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2020).

3
Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 13.

4
Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 10.

5
Paschalis M. Kitromilides, " 'Imagined Communities' and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans," *European History Quarterly* 19 (1989): 184–85.

6
Also called "the Greek war of independence" mostly by older studies. Certain methodological shifts in the study of revolutions have rendered the term "Greek Revolution" preferable. Thereon see my book review of *The Greek Revolution: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. Paschalis M. Kitromilides and Constantinos Tsoukalas, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 40, no. 2 (2022): 490–93.

7
The 1821–2021 bicentenary has prompted a new spate of studies on the Greek 1820s and some have stood out for their interest in matters of religion and the sacred in contrast to the conventional approach

(see further on here the references). First thereamong is the monumental study of Mark Mazower, *The Greek Revolution: 1821 and the Making of Modern Europe* (London: Penguin, 2021) that informed this article in terms of insights and reflections. A wealth of primary evidence pertaining to religion and the sacred in 1821 is to be found in the master's thesis of Pothitos Varvarigos, *Thriskeia kai thriskeutiki zoi kata ton polemo tis anexartisias* (University of Thessaloniki, 2011) as well as in the study of Elias Oikonomou, *O Theos kai to 1821* (Athens: Saitis, 2018). Unfortunately, both are of little analytical value.

8

For criticism on the understanding of nationalism as a distinctively secular phenomenon, see Peter Van der Veer and Harmut Lehman, "Introduction," in *Nation and Religion: Perspectives in Europe and Asia*, ed. Peter Van der Veer and Harmut Lehman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3–14; Talal Asad, "Religion, Nation State, Secularism," in *Nation and Religion,* 178–96; Philip S. Gorski, "The Mosaic Moment: An Early Modernist Critique of Modernist Theories of Nationalism," *American Journal of Sociology* 105, no. 5 (March 2000): 1428–68; cf. also Peter C. Mentzel, "Introduction: Religion and Nationalism? Or Nationalism and Religion? Some Reflections on the Relationship between Religion and Nationalism," *Genealogy* 4, no. 98 (2020): 1–8, https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy4040098.

9

See for example, Dionysios Zakythinos, *Tourkokratia* (Athens: n.e., 1957); Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity: A Study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the Eve of the Turkish Conquest to the Greek War of Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); Cf. also George Arnakis, "The Greek Church of Constantinople and the Ottoman Empire," *The Journal of Modern History* 24, no. 3 (September 1952): 235–51; George Arnakis, "The Role of Religion in the Development of Balkan Nationalism," in *The Balkans in Transition: Essays on the Development of Balkan Life and Politics since the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Barbara and Charles Jelavich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 115–44.

10

Smith, *Chosen Peoples*; Cf. Rogers Brubaker, *Grounds for Difference* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 107–8.

11

Van der Veer and Lehman, "Introduction," 6–7.

12

See for instance, Helena Rosenblatt, "The Christian Enlightenment," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity,* vol. 7, *Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution 1660–1815*, ed. Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 283–301; Mark Curran, "Mettons Toujours Londres: Enlightened Christianity and the Public in Pre-Revolutionary Francophone Europe," *French History* 24, no. 1 (2009): 40–59; L. Lehener and M. Printy, eds., *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe,* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). For a critique of Dimaras's thesis see Manolis Patiniotis, "Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment: In Search of a European Identity," in *Relocating the History of Science. Essays in Honor of Kostas Gavroglu*,

the Americas.[11] As we shall see, the belief in rebirth or revival of a whole nation, connected to both the Protestant metaphor of Awakening and the Orthodox idea of Resurrection, is particularly useful for my arguments.

Relatively recently, the older picture of the European Enlightenment—and concomitantly, that of the Greek Enlightenment—as a single and unified phenomenon with anti-Christian and anti-Church characteristics has been reviewed by a growing body of studies.[12] The Enlightenment is no longer studied as a monolithic secular phenomenon, while there is increasing appreciation of the intellectual effort to discover "ways to reconcile reason and faith, innovation with tradition, and individual freedom of thought with authority."[13] Looking beyond the bipolarity of religious and secular values, historians have come to address the complex relationship of the Enlightenment with religious belief and the engagement of the former with different forms of Christianity. In the Ottoman empire, for example, the cultural transfer of enlightened ideas from the West to the East involved the Orthodox Church and the intellectuals within its orbit. Not infrequently, the enlighteners opted to reform religion instead of outright rejecting it. Church and religion did re-emerge with a renewed prestige in restoration Europe. In Southern Europe, early liberalism developed an ambiguous, double-edged relationship with Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Being convinced that no society could survive without religious morality, southern liberals developed a variety of religious attitudes, but on the whole they did not abandon their established religions. At times they challenged them; at other times they combined them with new political tenets and sources of legitimacy. As the Greek revolutionary movement became an integral part of the great revolutionary wave of the 1820s that swept across Spain, Portugal, and the Italian peninsula, Greek liberals came to share the same concerns and considerations.[14] In spite of the anticlerical and radical ideals of a sizeable number of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Greek enlighteners and patriots (the two do not always coincide), the pre-war clash between religion and secularism cannot account for the development of Greek national consciousness as conventionally thought.[15] These empirical observations provide the empirical premise of my own approach.

Rogers Brubaker has singled out four distinct ways of studying the connection between religion and nationalism.[16] The one that treats religion and nationalism as intertwined or imbricated phenomena is perhaps the most relevant to my analysis here.[17] I will start by examining the anticlerical and radical ideals of a sizeable number of paragons of the Greek independence movement and the cultural and political reasons behind their pre-war clash with the highest source of religious authority in the Orthodox world, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Then I will probe the facets of imbrication between nationalist and religious discourses that first occurred as the independence movement started to grow beyond the avant-garde circles of republican nationalists and evolve into networks with increasing membership demands. It was within the so-called Friendly Society (*Philiki Etaireia*), certainly the most popular of these networks, that nationalism was wedded to religion. Finally, I will focus on the process of imbrication between nationalism and religion after the outbreak of the war as a binary process that affects and transforms both of them as a result of active confrontation of the Muslim Ottomans on the battlefield. Overall, the analysis here is geared more towards sacred beliefs and practices than institutions. If one is to understand the loyalty,

devotion, and allegiance to a given nation, one has to probe the way(s) the national sentiment is experienced through the enthrallment of performance and the effervescence of ritual.[18]

Clash with Tradition

The Greek Enlightenment proclaimed that modern Greeks were a distinct community of common culture and interests but were no match for their glorious ancestors because they had been enslaved by foreigners. Should the foreign yoke be removed, modern Greeks would again be restored to their ancient glory. The Greek enlighteners strove to break away from tradition and crystallise a specifically Greek, rather than Orthodox Christian, collective identity, pregnant with a sense of belonging to a wider European family. What they were seeking was not just political emancipation from the Ottoman rule but also spiritual emancipation from the Orthodox Christian tradition and establishment. The ultimate goal of this enterprise was the perspective of an autonomous political community, while the immediate objective was cultivating reverence for ancient Greece.

Indeed, the glory of Hellas had taken a firm hold in Greek hearts and minds. Some Greeks had gone as far as making libations to Poseidon before crossing the sea while others started to use exclusively classical names for their children or their students. Remarkably, in 1813 the cleric and teacher Dionysios Pyrros organised a ceremony in his school in Athens where he changed the Christian names of his pupils to the plaudits of the Athenian elders. As each pupil was called out, Pyrros presented him with a branch of laurel or olive, saying, "now your name is no longer Yannis or Pavlos . . . but Pericles, Themistocles, or Xenophon. Fear God, help your motherland and love philosophy." And the Athenian elders shouted out "Long live Pericles" or "Long live Themistocles."[19] A more extreme case perhaps was that of the physician and philosopher Georgios Sakellarios who offered prayers to the Olympian Gods on the death of his wife.[20]

The revival of Greek names, the teaching of classics in schools, the interest in the relics of antiquity, and the like culminated in the rise of a politicised sense of Hellenic identity with secular overtones which, in turn, was disseminated through an extended commerce-funded network of schools. Merchants stepped in to subsidise the publication of a body of literature which, increasingly secular as it was, aimed at a specifically Greek readership. A considerable fluctuation in the production and circulation of books followed suit. Literature, almanacs, newspapers, commercial guides, methods for teaching foreign languages, and translations all confirm a broadening in readers' concerns and interests.[21]

However, the enlighteners' call for political and spiritual emancipation represented a threat to the Orthodox Christian structures and moral order. For the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which had been wedded to the Ottoman status quo since the fall of Constantinople, the vision of a sovereign people in secular terms was a concept difficult to grasp and impossible to contemplate. Hence, at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, the Patriarchate adopted an increasingly obscurantist stance in theological, educational, and cultural matters. Books were burned and heresy trials were held in fear that the growing fascination with ancient Greece, let alone the introduction of natural sciences to the Greek schools, would undermine the religious attachments of the Ottoman-ruled Orthodox. Being a staunch opponent of the "foolish wisdom of Europe," the

ed. Theodore Arabatzis, Jurgen Renn and Ana Simoes (New York: Springer, 2015), 117–30; see also Gazi, "Revisiting Religion," 96–7. Kitromilides, one of the main proponents of Dimaras's thesis on secularism and the Greek Enlightenment, has revised, somewhat reluctantly, his earlier approach; see Paschalis Kitromilides, "The Enlightenment and the Greek cultural tradition," *History of European Ideas* 36 (2010): 39–46.

13
Jonathan Israel, *Europe and the radical Enlightenment. A typology of modernity's intellectual and cultural roots. C. Th. Dimaras Annual Lecture, 2004* (Athens: Institute for Neohellenic Research, 2005), 99.

14
Maurizio Isabella, "Citizens or Faithful? Religion and the Liberal Revolutions of the 1820s in Southern Europe," *Modern Intellectual History* 12, no. 3 (2015): 555–78; cf. Maurizio Isabella, *Southern Europe in the Age of Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023).

15
Konstantina Zanou, "Imperial Nationalism and Orthodox Enlightenment: A Diasporic Story Between the Ionian Islands, Russia and Greece, ca. 1800–30," in *Mediterranean Diasporas Politics and Ideas in the Long 19th Century*, ed. Maurizio Isabella and Konstantina Zanou (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 117–34; cf. Konstantina Zanou, *Transnational Patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800-1850: Stammering the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

16
Brubaker, *Grounds for Difference*, 103–16.

17
Brubaker, *Grounds for Difference,* 109–13.

18
Cf. Rachel Tsang and Taylor Woods, eds., *The Cultural Politics of Nationalism and Nation-Building: Ritual and performance in the forging of nations* (London: Routledge, 2013), 2–11.

19
Alexis Politis, "From Christian Roman Emperors to the Glorious Greek Ancestors," in *Byzantium and the Modern Greek Identity*, ed. David Ricks and Paul Magdalino (Aldershot: Ashgate 1998), 4, 11–12. See also Richard Clogg, "Sense of the Past in Pre-Independence Greece," in *Anatolica: Studies in the Greek East in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, ed. Richard Clogg (London: Variorum, 1996), 18.

20
Georgios Sakellarios, *Poimatia* (Vienna: Johann Schnierer, 1817), 7–18, 19–37.

21
Dimaras, *Neoellinikos Diaphotismos*, 23–91; cf. Catherine Koumarianou, "The Contribution of the Intelligentsia towards the Greek Independence Movement, 1798–1821," in *The Struggle for Greek Independence: Essays to Mark the 150th Anniversary of the Greek War of Independence*, ed. Richard Clogg (London: Macmillan, 1973), 67–86.

Ecumenical Patriarch Gregory V (1746–1821) bemoaned, according to a contemporary observer, that the Platos and Aristotles, the Newtons and Descartes, the triangles and logarithms led to indifference in matters divine.[22] What the Patriarch fretted most over, however, was the spirit of political radicalism that the French Revolution had spawned a few years prior. The Sultan shared the same fear.

The traditional good relations between France and the Porte changed course because of the Napoleonic campaigns. The French capture of the Ionian islands by the treaty of the Campo Formio (1797), an event of greater importance in Bonaparte's view than the occupation of the whole of Italy,[23] had strained Franco-Turkish relations. On his arrival in Corfu in June 1797, the Corsican General Gentili announced that Greece would again be restored to her ancient freedom and that the classical virtues would live once more because the French were bringing with them liberty and equality. In the eyes of the Ottomans, it was clear that Napoleon had designs on their domains. Rumours of insurrection were reaching Istanbul from different parts of the empire. The arrest in Trieste in December 1797 of the Greek patriot Rigas Velestinlis was another sign of alarm. Rigas was perhaps the best representative of the climate of great encouragement and enthusiasm Napoleon had created among the Greeks. Though caught on Austrian territory, Rigas carried a chest with revolutionary proclamations and other printed material against "the insufferable tyranny of the abominable Ottoman despotism."[24] Indeed, Napoleon crossed the threshold of the Ottoman world in the summer of 1798 with his invasion of Malta and his landing on Egypt. Aboard his ship he issued a declaration to the people of Egypt conceding, most astonishingly, that he was a God-sent liberator, a true Muslim himself, who had come to shake off the yoke of Egypt's Ottoman masters. Few Muslims, if any, were convinced of Napoleon's faith.[25] Sultan Mahmud IV declared war against France and called on the empire's supreme religious authorities to check the spread of French ideas. What the Sultan had envisaged in the first place was an Ottoman propaganda counteroffensive for the creation of a common front of believers, of whatever religion, against atheistical France. Patriarch Gregory V joined the effort because he saw the radical ideas of Rigas gaining increasing notoriety among Greeks. The "Paternal Instruction" (*Didaskalia Patriki*),[26] a work printed at the patriarchal press in Constantinople in the summer or early autumn of 1798 should be seen as part of this campaign.[27] The work's authorship remains unknown—the work bears the name of the Patriarch Anthimos of Jerusalem to whom Gregory V probably delegated the task of authoring, or merely had the text written under Anthimos's name—but what is clear is the author's insistence that Christians owed obedience to the Sultan because the Ottoman empire had been deliberately raised up by God to protect the Orthodox faith from adulteration:

> "See how clearly our Lord, boundless in mercy and all-wise, has undertaken to guard once more the unsullied Holy and Orthodox faith of us, the pious, and to save all mankind. He raised out of nothing this powerful empire of the Ottomans, in the place of our Roman [Byzantine] empire which had begun, in a certain way, to cause to deviate from the beliefs of the Orthodox faith, and He raised up the empire of the Ottomans higher than any other kingdom so as to show without doubt that it came about by divine will, and not by the power of man, and to assure all the

22
Konstantinos M. Koumas, *Oi Ellines: Diaphotismos—Epanastasi*, photocopied reprint of the vol. 12 of Koumas's *Istoriai ton Anthropinon Praxeon* (Athens: Karavias, 1998 [first published 1832]), 514.

23
Richard Clogg, "The 'Dhidhaskalia Patriki' (1798): An Orthodox Reaction to French Revolutionary Propaganda," *Middle Eastern Studies* 5, no. 2 (May 1969): 89.

24
Clogg, "The 'Dhidhaskalia Patriki (1798)," 90.

25
Save for political calculation, Napoleon's strange assertion about himself and the French expeditionary force as being of Muslim religion was related to the French translation of the Qur'ān by Claude-Etienne Savary (1783), which portrayed Muhammad as an iconoclast religious reformer and Islam as the equivalent of philosophical deism. See John Tolan, *Faces of Muhammad: Western Perceptions of the Prophet of Islam from the Middle Ages to Today* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 186–88.

26
Didaskalia Patriki syntetheisa para tou makariotatou Patriarchou tis agias poleos Ierousalim kyr Anthimou [. . .] (Constantinople: n.e., 1798).

27
Clogg, "The 'Dhidhaskalia Patriki (1798)," 89–94.

> faithful that in this way He deigned to bring about a great mystery, namely salvation to his chosen people . . . The all-mighty Lord . . . puts into the heart of the sultan of these Ottomans an inclination to keep free the religious beliefs of our Orthodox faith and, as a work of supererogation, to protect them, even to the point of occasionally chastising Christians who deviate from their faith, that they have always before their eyes the fear of God."[28]

The assertion that the Ottoman empire was ordained by God provoked the immediate reaction of progressive Greeks. Before the end of the same year (1798), the Paris-based intellectual father of Greek national revival, Adamantios Korais, penned a pamphlet with the title "Brotherly Instruction" (*Adelphiki Didaskalia*)[29] where he defended liberty and democracy. Korais published the pamphlet anonymously, faking the place of publication (Rome instead of Paris). As he put it in the introduction, the pamphlet aimed at correcting the false impression under which a learned European might surmise the true feelings of Greeks when reading the "Paternal Instruction"[30]; nonetheless, one understands that Korais's intention was to counter the damage this text might have inflicted on the development of Greek national consciousness. Korais dismissed the "Paternal Instruction" as a token of monkish obscurantism and assured his readers that the true feelings of the Greeks had always been unwaveringly patriotic. He eschewed, however, a frontal attack on the Patriarchate and took good care to buttress his polemic with scriptural references so it would not offend the religious sensibilities of his Orthodox readers. Korais's refutation prompted a counter-rebuttal by one of the most prolific Orthodox antagonists of Western thought, Athanasios Parios, who in turn authored a pamphlet with the strange title *Neos Rapsakis*. Yet it never actually made it to the publisher because Korais's followers managed to filch the manuscript from the person to whom Parios had tasked with overseeing the publication. The stolen manuscript was subsequently sent to Korais as a token of "the perversity of the wretched monks who, . . . under the pretext of defending religion, seek the perpetual enslavement and ignorance of our nation."[31]

As the Church turned against the movement of Greek national revival favoring *ethelodouleia*—that is, of willing and blind submission to the powers that be—it became the target of even more vigorous criticism by a new generation of Greek radical enlighteners who came to the fore in the 1800s and 1810s. Attacks on the Patriarchate and its hierarchy became increasingly bitter and frequent. One such attack is the satirical poem *Rossoanglogallos* (1812) where a Russian, an Englishman, and a Frenchman[32] explore the reasons for Greece's continual enslavement while on a tour of the Greek lands. Hiding behind anonymity, the poet finds the upper strata of the pre-independence Greek society to be friendly with tyranny. Unsurprisingly, an Orthodox prelate takes to the stage and shamelessly boasts of avarice:

> "I do not know of the yoke [of the Turk] . . . / I eat and drink with pleasure, / I do not feel the tyranny . . . / Two things I crave, yes indeed, . . . / Lots of money and nice girls."[33]

What is perhaps the most well-known tract of pre-independence Greek republicanism, the polemic of 1806 with the title "Hellenic Nomarchy, that is a discourse on Freedom" (*Elliniki Nomarchia, itoi Logos peri Eleutherias*), is informed by fervent anti-clericalism. The author, who used the pseudonym

28
I use Clogg's translation for this excerpt; see Clogg, "The 'Dhidhaskalia Patriki (1798)," 104. Adamantios Korais reprinted the full text in his *Brotherly Instruction* (see below n. 14). For the excerpt, see p. 11.

29
Adelphiki didaskalia pros tous euriskomenous kata pasan tin Othomanikin epikrateian Graecous [. . .] (Rome: n.e., 1798).

30
Korais, *Adelphiki didaskalia*, IV.

31
Richard Clogg, "Anti-Clericalism in Pre-Independence Greece C. 1750-1821," *Studies in Church History* 13 (1976): 260.

32
This is what the title means: "*Rossoanglogallos*" is a word jumble implying the three great powers taken as one vis-à-vis the Greek problem. During the 1810s the poem circulated in manuscript enjoying a considerable vogue in Greek patriotic circles.

33
Here I use Clogg's translation in Clogg, "Anti-Clericalism," 268.

"Anonymous the Hellene," conceded that the two main reasons for the continued enslavement of the Greeks were priestly ignorance and the absence of Greece's best citizens, who had moved abroad. The metropolitans ate and drank like pigs, sleeping fourteen hours at night and two hours at midday and when they did not, "they [thought] up the most shameful and base things you could possibly imagine." "Beloved," they say to the faithful, "God gave us the Ottoman tyranny, to punish us for our sins, chastising us in the present life so that he may liberate us after death from eternal torment"; the phrase alludes unmistakably to the "Paternal Instruction."[34]

Besides emphasising the moral denigration of the church, Anonymous the Hellene threw into relief how a given nation could lose its political autonomy to foreign conquerors, and along with it lose its cultural prominence, if ignorance and superstition prevailed. To this end, the author went on to sketch out a historical outline of Greece's rise and fall, from antiquity up to his day: Greece in antiquity had been at the apex of civilisation but internal dissention made it the first to succumb to the Roman sword. When Christianity took over the empire of the Romans, the Greeks lost any hope of liberation as they sank into ignorance and superstition. Deprived of their "old-time character," the Greeks succumbed easily to the more superstitious and ignorant Ottomans.[35] The message conveyed by the *Hellenic Nomarchy* could not be clearer: behind the historical vicissitudes and political misfortunes of the Greek nation stood not only the Orthodox church motivated, as it were, by the spirit of subservience to the powers that be, but also Christianity, a culturally obscurantist and backward religion.

34
Anonymous the Hellene, *Elliniki Nomarchia, itoi Logos peri Eleutherias*, ed. Giorgos Valetas (Athens: Aposperitis, 1982), 168, 175.

35
See Anonymous the Hellene, *Elliniki Nomarchia,* 121–26, cf. 215.

Secular Replacement?

Historians have justifiably underlined the republican anti-clericalism of the protagonists of Greek independence. Rigas Velestinlis's surviving manifesto of 1797 called "New Political Constitution for the Inhabitants of Rumeli, Asia Minor, the Mediterranean Islands and Wallachia-Moldavia" [*Nea politiki dioikisis ton katoikon tis Roumelis, tis Mikras Asias, ton Mesogeion Nison kai tis Vlachobogdanias*] had no place for the church in the secular administration for which it provided after the overthrow of the Ottoman rule.[36] Adamatios Korais, for his part, escalated his social criticism on the eve of the Greek Revolution with the publication "Counseling of Three Bishops" [*Symvouli trion episkopon*] (1820), an anti-clerical tract that seemingly referred to the Catholic church but actually targeted the Orthodox ecclesiastical establishment, and in which Korais castigated the prelates and the monks for ". . . fooling the people with the superstitious rituals, the fake relics, the fabricated miracles, the untrue stories."[37]

Greek nationalists would attack Christianity or the Orthodox Church for the lamentable condition into which Greece had fallen, but this does not mean that nationalists were (and are) by default dedicated secularists whose thought and action precludes religious feelings, symbols, and values. Anti-clericalism is not tantamount to atheism. In the interrogation that followed his arrest by the Austrians, and preceded his execution by the Turks, Rigas confessed that he always wanted to see Greece free but this came second after his wish to save his soul.[38] Witnesses reported, on the other hand, that Korais on his deathbed muttered Psalm 137: 5–6,[39] where the exiled Jews lament the loss of the land God had promised to them. Throughout his life, Korais had focused on "translating" purely religious values into political terms—what Kedourie calls "transvaluation

36
Clogg, "Anti-Clericalism," 275, n. 46.

37
Adamantios Korais, *Symvouli trion episkopon, epistaltheisa, kata to 1553 etos, pros ton Papan Ioulion ton triton* (London: Printed for W. Truthlover, 1820), VIII.

38
Emile Legrand and Spyridon Lambros, *Anekdota eggrafa peri Riga Velestinli kai ton syn auto martyrisanton* (Athens: Perris, 1891), 65.

39
Iakovos Rotas, ed., *Apanthisma epistolon Adamantiou Korai* (Athens: Rallis, 1839), τγ'.

of values"[40]—and he seemingly continued to do so until his last breath: the psalmic Jerusalem in his mind would have likely stood for Greece.[41]

Another group of Greek nationalists that made up the Friendly Society (*Philiki Etaireia*), the secret society that spearheaded the idea of the Greek uprising from 1814 up to the 1821, had also set out to "translate" sacred values into political ones. In fact, the Society did draw on the sacred motifs and symbols of the Greek past irrespective of origin or epoch. The Society's emblems, for instance, included not only the Christian cross but also the owl of Minerva[42]; whereas the rites of member initiation mixed Christian oath-taking with invocations to the "power of the priests of the Eleusinian mysteries."[43] The Christian side, however, was decidedly emphasised. The Society's founding fathers had reportedly chosen to celebrate its birth anniversary on the 14th of September, when the Orthodox church celebrates the Elevation of the Cross.[44] On this day, Orthodoxy mainly celebrates the discovery of the relic of the True Cross by Helena but also recalls two other incidents: first, the celestial apparition of a cross of light over the camp of Constantine the Great with the words "Εν τούτω νίκα" or "In hoc signo vinces"—"by this sign conquer"—on the eve of the decisive battle against his rival Maxentius in *Mulvius Pons* (312 AD); and second, the restoration to Jerusalem of the piece of the True Cross that the Persians had taken from the city (630 AD) after a successful campaign of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius against the Sassanids. If the two incidents have something in common, it is the military triumph of Christianity over its enemies.

The Friendly Society was likely the first patriotic organization to render religion a crucial factor in its understanding of the Greek nation. The oath of the newly initiated members urged them to keep faith in their own religion, without disrespecting the religions of others, but also demanded that they "hate, persecute and exterminate the enemies of the religion of the Nation and of [their] country." Evidently, no Muslims or Jews were conceived as belonging to the "Nation."[45] Nationalists, suggests Anthony Smith, only rarely attempt to destroy entirely an older, religious identity because they realise that, if their message is to be communicated widely and effectively, it needs to be couched in the language and imagery of those they wish to mobilise and liberate.[46] Save for religion, the language and imagery of the Ottoman-ruled Christian peasants before the Greek war of independence had also been grounded on prophecy.

Within medieval and early modern Greek literature, prophecy is a genre in its own right. Medieval and early modern Greek prophetic literature aimed at restoring hope and dignity to the community of Orthodox Christians during times of threat, anxiety, and change by offering divine assurances that any state of political affairs tormenting the community of the faithful would not last for long. The day of deliverance, *i imera Kyriou* ("the day of the Lord"), was under way. From this vantage point, Islam was nothing but a sinister force that had subdued the once powerful Eastern Roman Empire and brought the mighty Eastern Christian Church to its knees. For the community of the subjugated eastern Christians, this had been a tangible historical experience for which the Book of Revelation offered a scriptural foundation: Revelation 13:7 refers to one obscure diabolic beast that would be "given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them," while 19:20 refers to a mysterious false prophet who would act on behalf of the beast. Save for the Apocalypse of John, biblical and extra-biblical prophecy was also utilised in different

40
Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism in Asia and Africa* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 37.

41
Known as "By the rivers of Babylon," Psalm 137 is the 137th psalm of the Book of Psalms. Verses 5–6 read: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget [her cunning]. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy."

42
See the flag's depiction in Vasilis Panagiotopoulos, "I Philiki Etaireia: Organotikes Proypotheseis tis Ethnikis Epanastasis," in *Istoria tou Neou Ellinismou 1770-2000* (Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 2003), 3:15.

43
Ambrosios Phrantzis, *Epitomi tis Istorias tis Anagennitheisis Ellados arhomeni apo tou Etous 1715 kai ligousa to 1835* (Athens: K. Kastorhis kai syntrophia, 1839), 1:302.

44
Panagiotopoulos, "I Philiki Etaireia," 15.

45
Evdoxios Doxiadis, "Defining a Hellene. Legal constructs and sectarian realities in the Greek War of Independence," *Open Military Studies* 2 (2022): 152.

46
Anthony D. Smith, "The 'Sacred' Dimension of Nationalism," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 3 (2000): 800–803.

proportions, yet the texts that compose medieval and early modern Greek prophetic literature are called *chrismoi* (oracles) and *chrismologia* (oracular literature). The authors and interpreters of oracular literature, and its mere adherents, fostered belief in the coming of a deliverer, a saviour Christian king of this world who would defeat the Muslims and restore lost sacred space and sovereignty to Christians. Occasionally, the motif of a people-deliverer would appear as well, which came to be identified with the fellow Orthodox Russians, especially since the Russian empire started to beat the Ottomans militarily in the late eighteenth century. Throughout the centuries of Ottoman rule, early modern Greek prophetic literature[47] became a major source of anti-Ottoman and anti-Muslim sentiment on the political and religious level, thereby forging a bond that linked the subjugated Orthodox community. Attempts have been made to show that in the age of revolution, this literature was turned into a validating charter for collective actions and political stances that would otherwise have appeared unacceptably revolutionary to the populace.[48] No matter how backward and "medieval" it would appear in the eyes of nationalists, oracular prophecy was useful insofar as it assured the masses that their political status was destined to be reversed. Therefore, it was used as an adjunct for mobilisation around a cause that was otherwise modern and secular. It was not accidental that the founding members of the Friendly Society had deliberately created the impression that their struggle had Russia's unconditional backing.[49] Evidence abounds[50] that prophecy was used as a popular means of nationalistic indoctrination before the war, facilitating the reach of the Friendly Society within peasant communities and increasing considerably its membership—especially after 1819, when the Society, faced as it were with increasing requests for membership, "came to indoctrinate even the swineherds" as a contemporary witness noted.[51]

What was more, oracular literature became the source of powerful vocabulary, imagery, and symbolism that was also entrenched in the teachings of the Orthodox church: the vocabulary, imagery, and symbolism of resurrection. The idea of bringing back to life a dead entity by the will of God, on which Eastern Christianity focuses more than its Western counterpart, helped Greek nationalists to popularise the notion that Greece could be reborn, would be reborn, or was destined to be reborn as a political community. Up to the outbreak of the 1821, the idea of resurrection became a cornerstone of the Greek nationalistic discourse, one that emphasised the importance of the Greek homeland and people and at the same time couched the patriotic message in the language and imagery of faith. It is not without importance that Anonymous the Hellene used the title "The resurrection of the nation"[52] in the fifth and final chapter of the *Hellenic Nomarchy*; as for Adamantios Korais, he used the same terminology[53] as did the intellectual and teacher Constantinos Oikonomos in his enthralling speeches,[54] to name but a few examples. In late spring 1821, at the village of *Milies* in Mount Pelion, a company of young men raised glasses in a toast: "The Christ has risen, long live the resurrection of the homeland, long live liberty." It was the very same people who a few days later would spark revolution in the region.[55]

Imbrication with Religion

Originally, the Greek revolution had been planned to break out in the Morea (modern-day Peloponnese), a region remote from the Ottoman capital with a

47
Marios Hatzopoulos, "Eighteenth-century Greek Prophetic Literature," in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, vol. 14, *Central and Eastern Europe (1700-1800)*, ed. David Thomas and John Chesworth (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 382–402.

48
Marios Hatzopoulos, "From Resurrection to Insurrection: 'sacred' myths, motifs, and symbols in the Greek War of Independence," in *The Making of Modern Greece: Nationalism, Romanticism and the Uses of the Past (1797-1896)*, ed. Roderick Beaton and David Ricks (London: Ashgate, 2009), 81–93; Marios Hatzopoulos, "Oracular Prophecy and the Politics of Toppling Ottoman Rule in South-East Europe," *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique* 8 (2011): 95–116; Marios Hatzopoulos, "Prophetic Structures of the Ottoman-ruled Orthodox Community in Comparative Perspective: Some Preliminary Observations," in *Greek-Serbian Relations in the Age of Nation-Building*, ed. Paschalis Kitromilides and Sophia Matthaiou (Athens: SNR-NHRF, 2016), 121–47; Marios Hatzopoulos, "Saints in revolt: The anti-Ottoman Vision of kyr Daniel," in *Early Modern Prophecies in Transnational, National and Regional Contexts*, vol. 2, *The Mediterranean World*, ed. Lionel Laborie and Ariel Hessayon (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 246–76.

49
Emmanuel Xanthos, *Apomnimoneumata peri tis Philikis Etaireias* (Athens: A. Garpolas, 1845), 12.

50
For pertinent evidence see Hatzopoulos, "Oracular Prophecy," 109–12; Hatzopoulos, "Prophetic Structures," 142–45.

51
Ambrosios Phrantzis, *Epitomi tis Istorias tis Anagennitheisis Ellados arhomeni apo tou Etous 1715 kai ligousa to* 1835 (Athens: K. Kastorhis kai syntrophia, 1839), 1:79–80.

52
Anonymous the Hellene, *Elliniki Nomarchia*, 201–23. Anonymous uses the synonym "*genos*" for the term "nation."

53
See for instance his letter of 27th March 1815 where Korais referred to the prospect of "the resurrection of Greece"; Adamantios Korais, *Allilografia*, ed. K. Th. Dimaras et al. (Athens: Estia, 1979), 3:401.

54
See for example Oikonomos's speech of 1st October 1821 where the word is about the "on-going resurrection of Greece"; Constantinos Oikonomos o ex Oikonomon, *Logoi*, ed. K. Sperantzas (Athens: n.e., 1971), 291, cf. 304.

55
Rigas N. Kamilaris, *Grigoriou Konstanta: Biographia - Logoi - Epistolai, meta Perigraphis ton Mileon kai tis Scholis Auton* (Athens: A. Konstantinidis, 1897), 29–30.

high ratio of Christians to Muslims and with powerful Christian land-owing elites who retained armed bands at their command and exercised a considerable degree of local autonomy. All these circumstances increased the chances of the uprising's success, thereby making Morea a rump for creating a future Greek-Christian state. Nevertheless, the plan eventually changed and the Friendly Society's leader, Alexandros Ypsilantis, a former aide-de-camp of Tsar Alexander I who had an eminent Phanariot background, decided on an opening thrust in the north, more particularly in the Danubian Principalities in an apparent bid to stir up the other Balkan peoples and draw Russia into the conflict. It was there that the war broke out first, in February 1821, and then in late March in what was eventually to become Greece. However, things in the Principalities did not develop as Ypsilantis had hoped: the revolution was renounced by the Tsar, condemned by the Holy Alliance, and excommunicated by the Patriarchate, but down to the south, in mainland Greece, the Morea, the Aegean islands, and Crete, the uprising took root and gradually evolved into a full-scale and prolonged conflict.[56]

From the onset, Ottomans viewed the war in the light of religious difference. Upon learning the news from the Danubian Principalities, the Porte called for holy war, interpreting the uprising as a battle between Islam and Christianity through the lens of what would be called today conspiracy theory. The Orthodox Christian Ottoman subjects, and particularly the Greeks,[57] were accused not only of sedition but also of complicity in a wider plot to annihilate all Muslims.[58] The hand of Moscow was alleged to have guided the movement; Ypsilantis had made it known that seventy thousand Russians would soon be crossing the border to his aid.[59] The Sultan issued orders to provincial pashas requesting help and the pashas pledged to defend Islam and the empire. According to the British ambassador to the Porte, Lord Strangford, the Sultan had clearly decided "to strike terror into the minds of [his] Greek subjects."[60] In Strangford's words, terror commenced with the appearance of "an armed and licentious population, wandering through the streets of this capital and its suburbs, daily commit[ing] such excesses as destroy all confidence on the part of the *reaya*, in the security of their lives and property"[61] and escalated with the execution of prominent and influential members of the capital's Orthodox community, in particular members of Phanariot families. The most notorious in the series of public executions was the hanging of the Ecumenical Patriarch Gregory V, on Easter Sunday in April 1821. Gregory had anathematised the Greek revolt and excommunicated Ypsilantis along with his supporters, yet in the eyes of the Sultan he stood guilty for failing to maintain the subordination of the Eastern Christians over whom he presided as religious and communal leader. The Patriarch's dead body was dragged through the streets and tossed into the Golden Horn, igniting the sympathy of co-religionists in Russia and liberals in the West. In the ensuing weeks and months, arbitrary Ottoman attacks targeted Greek churches, shops, and clergy, in Constantinople, Adrianople, Smyrna, Salonica, Crete, and Cyprus, so as to frighten the Orthodox communities into obedience and pre-empt any movement on their part. Involuntarily but decisively, the Ottoman authorities came to give the Greek uprising a solidly religious character.

Christian violence against Muslims in the Principalities and the Morea had also come to confirm the Porte's perception of the Greek uprising as a war of religion. Once the fighting broke out, sporadic attacks against Muslims soon evolved into an all-encompassing wave of murderous

56
Dean Konstantaras, *Nationalism and Revolution in Europe, 1763-1848* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 124–25.

57
Notably, Ottoman state authorities appear to have differentiated between "Graikoi" and Rum/Romioi. See Christine Philliou, *Biography of an Empire : Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 70–71.

58
See the imperial decree (*ferman*) to the Muslim population, wherein the sultan warned of a plot to take over the seat of the imperial government: "Muslims: in the month of April, when the *giavur* [infidels] have their Easter, they have conspired on that day to set fire to Asia, across from . . . [the Old City quarter of İstanbul] . . . , planning that we will cross the straits to put out the fire. At that moment they will enter Byzantium and take the throne," cited in Philliou, *Biography*, 68; Cf. also the dispatch (10th April 1821) of Britain's ambassador to the Sublime Porte, Lord Strangford, to Foreign Secretary Castlereagh: ". . . the insurrections in Wallachia and Moldavia, and the rebellious movements in other places, are attributed to a design formed by the Greeks, for the total overthrow of the Mahometan religion," cited in Theophilus C. Prousis, "British Embassy Reports on the Greek Uprising in 1821-1822: War of Independence or War of Religion?", *History Faculty Publications* 21 (2011): 187; cf. also Theophilus C. Prousis, "Eastern Orthodoxy Under Siege in the Ottoman Levant: A View from Constantinople in 1821," *History Faculty Publications* 13 (2008): 46. Conspiracy theorising is not a recent phenomenon but has considerable historical depth, Michael Butter, "Bad History, Useless Prophecy: The 'Paranoid Style' Revisited," *Symploke* 29, no. 1–2 (2021): 28–30.

59
Thomas W. Gallant, *The Edinburgh History of the Greeks, 1768 to 1913: The Long Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 68.

60
Prousis, "British Embassy Reports," 187.

61
Prousis, "British Embassy Reports," 187.

violence. Muslims were swept away irrespective of age, occupation, and gender. Ypsilantis's troops committed massacres in the Romanian cities of Jassy and Galati whereas the troops of Theodoros Kolokotronis, the supreme military leader of the revolution in the Morea, killed the entire Muslim population of the Ottoman capital of the Morea, Tripolitsa. As the war progressed, mosques, hammams, fountains, and tombs were attacked and destroyed. One reason for the violence was the chronic mistreatment suffered by the Christians at the hands of their former masters. The other was religious hatred. As Mark Mazower has observed, "one reason why the Greek war of independence reached levels of violence unseen in the other revolts in southern Europe was that it assumed at the outset the character of a religious clash."[62] Sometimes religious violence was calculated to create a breach between Christian and Muslim communities, hence marking a point of no return for the belligerents. However unholy, religiously induced violence was a means of sacralising the war. This had not escaped the attention of the British. "The insurgents" wrote Strangford in a dispatch to the Foreign Office, ". . . have attempted to consecrate their revolution by religious processions and ceremonies without end, and by the murder of many defenceless [sic] Turks."[63] However, for the insurgents, the war had not been conceived, planned, or organised as a holy war. There was no deliberate plan for the destruction of the Muslim communities of the Morea and mainland Greece.[64] Alexandros Mavrokordatos, the civilian leader of the besieged town of Missolonghi, made this clear in his reply to the leader of the Ottoman besiegers, Omer Vryoni Pasha:

> "Your highness, we don't have war with [Muslims] . . . we don't care at all if one believes in Mahomet and the other in Christ . . . what we want is to be free in this world and live under our own laws, like the other free nations live under their own laws, and not to be slaves because our ancestors had not been slaves to anyone."[65]

A small number of Muslims aligned themselves with the revolution and served in the Greek camp as soldiers, physicians, surgeons, and translators of Ottoman documents. Several went as far as claiming pensions for war service or compensation for family properties lost during the war.[66] On the part of the Greeks, nevertheless, the war had been declared in the name of religion and homeland with the former coming first. Revolutionary proclamations were quite telling thereon and the most famous perhaps was the one issued by Ypsilantis himself under the title, "Fight for the faith and homeland."[67] Greek nationality and citizenship were connected to the Greek Orthodox faith from early on. From the "temporary" local charters that were drafted in the early months of the war to the first constitutions of Epidaurus in 1821 and Astros in 1823, Orthodox Christianity was made the official religion of the state and Greek citizenship was reserved for Greek Orthodox Christians. Connecting nationality and faith was in line with other constitutional projects in southern Europe. Many adherents of the 1812 Cadiz constitution, particularly in the Mediterranean, who advocated liberal constitutionalism, considered religious uniformity as an essential element of national identity. Whether it was the Catholic faith in Spain, Portugal, and Italy, or Orthodoxy in Greece, they viewed it as a crucial aspect.[68] However, the Greek constitutions of 1822 and 1823 also embraced the principles of religious tolerance and equality under the law. They stated that all religions and their rituals could be freely practiced,

62
Mazower, *The Greek Revolution*, xxxiii.

63
Strangford to Castlereagh, FO 78/98, ff. 226–31a, 25th May 1821, cited in Prousis, "British Embassy Reports," 192.

64
Doxiadis, "Defining a Hellene," 155.

65
Document batch of 1823, undated leaf; *Istorikon archeion Alexandrou Mavrokordatou*, vol. 5, issue 3 (Athens: Academia Athinon, 1968), 3. Similar discourse was employed by the Greek revolutionaries in Crete somewhat later, in November 1828: "We are not enemies of the Turks, nor of their religion. We are indifferent to one's personal beliefs. We don't seek to persecute anyone but to change merely the conduct of government. What we are after is justice; what we want is to secure one's dignity, life and property. We can't bow the neck any longer . . ."; see Manos Vourliotis, "I epanastasi stin Kriti (1825-1830). Ena anekdoto cheirografo," in *Apo to 1821 sto 2012*, ed. Martha Pylia (Athens: Vivliorama, 2012), 108.

66
Stefanos Katsikas, *Islam and Nationalism in Modern Greece, 1821–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 41.

67
Cf. Lucien Frary, "The Orthodox Church," in *The Greek Revolution: A Critical Dictionary,* ed. Paschalis M. Kitromilides and Constantinos Tsoukalas (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2021), 486. Interestingly, the title of this proclamation seems to be in dialogue with a line of *Hellenic Nomarchy* where Anonymous the Hellene reproached the preachers in church: " 'In church why do preachers never mention the maxim 'Fight for faith and country' . . . why do they never point to the examples set by Themistocles, by Aristides, by Socrates and the myriad other virtuous and wise men . . . ?" Anonymous the Hellene, *Elliniki Nomarchia*, 174.

68
Maurizio Isabella, "Citizens or Faithful?", 555–78.

Fig. 1. Ary Scheffer, *Les femmes souliotes*, 1827. Oil on canvas. Paris, Louvre Museum. Source of the photo: Ary Scheffer Museum. Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 2. Ary Scheffer, *Les femmes souliotes*, ca. 1826. Oil on canvas [preparatory sketch]. Reims, Musée des beaux-arts de Reims. Photograph © Christian Devleeschauwer. Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 3. Ary Scheffer, *Les femmes souliotes*. Oil on canvas [preparatory sketch]. Source of the photo: Ader, *Dessins, miniatures & tableaux anciens*, mardi 4 mai 2021 [auction catalog], accessed 1st December 2023, https://www.gazette-drouot.com/telechargement/catalogue?venteId=113659.

and both "foreigners" and Greeks were regarded as equals in the eyes of the law. The constitution of Troezen in 1827 loosened the knot of citizenship and Christianity by facilitating the acquisition of Greek citizenship for "foreigners." Although it was not explicitly stated, this constitution effectively eliminated religious requirements for citizenship. Moreover, it took a brave step in reducing Church power in insurgent Greece by preventing lower clergy from holding public office.[69]

In spite of the Patriarchal effort to defuse any revolutionary activity, those who initially embraced the revolution, including bishops and parish priests, understood that faith and war participation went hand in hand on the road toward independence. The ceremonial act of blessing the arms and the banners of the revolutionaries took place in almost every location in Greece that rose up in revolt, becoming thus an integral part of the Greek "revolutionary script."[70] Historians doubt whether the ritual ever happened at the monastery of Hagia Lavra, where the archbishop of the Old Patras Germanos allegedly blessed the flag of the rebels, thus igniting the war in the Morea[71] as Greek public history has it today. But the ritual did happen in Kalamata, in Patras and numberless other spots throughout Greece during March and April 1821. In the Aegean, religious ceremonies also took place on every island that had joined the uprising and where the clergy made sermons and blessed vessels before the captains and their crew departed on missions.[72] In Kalamata, two dozen priests held a liturgy before five thousand armed Greek Christians, who were about to fight for first time in their lives on 23th March 1821. In his memoirs, Kolokotronis solemnly recalled how the crowd was gathered by the river of Kalamata while the priests led public prayers.[73] Modes and styles of ceremony and ritual, such as raising the flag or banner, public worship, and processions were sometimes orchestrated and formally structured, such as the one hundred young men of Hydra who carried in procession a flag to be blessed by the island's archpriest.[74] Other times the ceremonial content and sequence was improvised in situ by the local leader(s) of the revolution. Here individual choices, perceptions, emotions, and beliefs were crucial for the outcome. Lykourgos Logothetis, for instance, the local leader of the island of Samos, thought it expedient to make an appearance before the insurgent Samiots with an ancient Greek helmet on his head, the culmination of a sequence of ceremonial acts that had commenced with a candle-lit liturgy and flag raising. Apparently, there are several layers of interpretation of this scene because a candle-lit liturgy

69
Doxiadis, "Defining a Hellene," 157; cf. also Gallant, *The Edinburgh History of the Greeks,* 86.

70
For the term see Keith Michael Baker and Dan Edelstein, "Introduction," in *Scripting Revolution: A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions*, ed. Keith Michael Baker and Dan Edelstein (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 1–21.

71
As it appears, the scene never actually happened but rather stemmed from the narrative of the French traveler and diplomat Pouqueville (1824) and its subsequent illustration by philhellenic artists; see Christina Koulouri, *Historical Memory in Greece, 1821–1930: Performing the Past in the Present* (London: Routledge, 2023), 38.

72
Frary, "The Orthodox Church," 489.

73
Theodoros Kolokotronis, *Diigisis symvanton tis ellinikis phylis apo ta 1770 eos ta 1836. Ypagoreuse o Theodoros Kolokotronis*, ed. Georgios Tertsetis (Athens: Ch. N. Philadelpheus, 1846), 52.

74
Nikolaos Spiliadis, *Apomnimoneumata, itoi Istoria tis Epanastaseos ton Ellinon* (Athens: Institouto anaptyxis Charilaos Trikoupis, 2007), 1:102.

in the Orthodox church is organised to celebrate Christ's resurrection at Easter—and in this case the resurrection of the nation—while wearing the helmet would be to emphasise Greek continuity.[75] Flags and banners played a key role in those instances and though decorative motifs spanned from the pagan past (e.g., the owl of Minerva denoting wisdom, the phoenix denoting regeneration) to Christian iconography (e.g., military saints like St George), the most common motif to appear on Greek revolutionary flags was the symbol of the cross. The cross-upon-crescent complex, inspired by the Friendly Society, was standard among the motifs decorating the Greek flags at sea. As for land flags, with a few words in his usual stiff prose, Kolokotronis concludes in his memoirs with the description of the aforementioned scene by the river of Kalamata: "Right away, I had two flags cut from cloth with the cross [sewn thereon] and we set off."[76]

75
Michael B. Sakellariou, *Enas syntagmatikos dimokratis igetis kata tin epanastasi tou '21. O G. Logothetis Lykourgos tis Samou* (Heraklion: PEK, 2014), 29.

76
Kolokotronis, *Diigisis*, 52.

Imbrication with Nationalism

Before the war, as we have seen, various paragons of the Greek nationalist movement were highly critical of the clergy and the monks for cultural and political reasons. They were wrong. In the Morea and mainland Greece, the monks did support the revolution through taking care of the wounded and providing food, gunpowder, and ammunition, or even through fighting on the battlefield. Many of them met with a cruel fate at the hands of the Ottomans.[77] Ever within the reach of peasants, monasteries were beacons of faith, channels of traditional learning, and fountains of prophetic and apocalyptic expectations. Priests, for their part, would accompany the Greek troops, playing an important role in maintaining the fighters' morale or in joining the fray as combatants. They would lead the soldiers' prayers on the eve of battles and hold thanksgiving liturgies thereafter. Most of them had the same background as the peasants and shared with them more or less the same feelings, sorrows, and aspirations. They too had been brought up too through prophecies and oracles in the hope of "casting off the infidel dynast" and of founding something of a Christian state.[78] The low-rank clergy and the monks had barely grasped the pre-war rift of the church with Greek nationalists and intellectual-enlighteners. In the case of the higher clergy, however, the picture was undoubtedly more complex. Being a formal institution of the Ottoman empire, the Ecumenical Patriarchate had to make sure that Orthodox Christians remained faithful to the Sultan to whom Providence had entrusted the Orthodox flock because it had sinned. However, predicting the end of the Ottomans—that is, predicting the end of Islam itself—was a temptation hard to resist, even for the top rank of the Orthodox clergy. In 1657, the Ecumenical Patriarch Parthenius III was hanged for making oracular references to the end of Islam and the revival of Christian domination in one of his letters intercepted by the Ottoman authorities.[79] Among the scrutinisers of prophetic and apocalyptic scriptures, there existed ample room for top clergymen. Some might have treated it as an outlet of anti-Ottoman feelings and others might have simply realised that there was nothing wrong in believing that the "Hagarenes" were destined to lose their world-renowned empire through the very same means they had gained it: the will of Providence.

Of course, these considerations were not enough to align the Orthodox prelates with the revolution. On the contrary, a sizeable part thereof felt uncomfortable and likely desperate on learning the news of the war. Some were arrested and put to death: this is what happened to Gregory V and seven synodic prelates in Constantinople. The same thing happened in

77
Frary, "The Orthodox Church," 489; see further, Charles Frazee, *The Orthodox Church and Independent Greece, 1821–1852* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

78
Phokion Kotzageorgis, "Clergymen," in *The Greek Revolution: A Critical Dictionary,* ed. Paschalis M. Kitromilides and Constantinos Tsoukalas (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2021), 344.

79
Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: From the End of Byzantium to the Present Day* (London: Phoenix, 2003), 78.

Cyprus to the archbishop Kyprianos and the metropolitans, as happened in Crete and elsewhere in the empire as part of the Ottoman reprisals. Others were incarcerated, likely tortured, but managed to survive: eight metropolitans, for example, were imprisoned in Tripolitsa, the Ottoman capital of the Morea, three of whom survived and were freed by Kolokotronis's troops in September 1821. The survivors had no other choice but to throw in their lot with the revolution. By contrast, another part of the top clergy did align itself with the revolution from the very beginning—recent research suggests they were far more numerous than those who harboured reservations at the start of the war.[80] These clergymen went on to take political initiatives behind the line of fire and/or join the military campaigns on the front. Few were motivated by liberal ideals, more entertained patriotic feelings in the broadest sense, and some saw in the war a chance to politically advance themselves. To all of them, however, this was a war of religion. On 25th March 1821, the archbishop of Old Patras Germanos at the head of a peasant army pitched a banner with the cross on the slopes of Patras, thereby making the city the epicentre of the uprising and himself the temporary leader of the Greek camp. On their march to Patras the peasants had chanted "Freedom, freedom in the name of Christ" as their war cry[81] and sung psalms. Kyrillos, bishop of Aigina, called upon the clergy of the islands Hydra, Spetses, and Poros to lead the war against the Muslims, promising salvation to those who fell in the sacred struggle.[82] Ioannikios bishop of Lidoriki in mainland Greece asked his flock to take revenge for the hanging of Patriarch Gregory V,[83] while another fiery archimandrite urged the insurgents ". . . to imitate Moses who triumphed over the Egyptians and Joshua who won the Amalekites and kill the blood-thirsty usurpers of the throne of Constantine," implying the Ottomans.[84] Orthodox religious discourse became imbricated with patriotism as a result of actively confronting the Ottoman Muslims on the battlefield. There were several modes of imbricating religion with patriotism for which the peasant troops were responsible as much as the insurgent clergy.

To embolden themselves on the battlefield, Greek fighters regularly chanted hymns or used "sacred" war cries. This did not go unnoticed by the Ottomans. Kaboutli Vasfi Effendi, an Ottoman irregular who left a valuable account of his military action in Greece, noted that Greeks during combat appealed often to the Cross or recited verses from the Gospel.[85] The Christian prayer "Lord have mercy" (in Greek: *Kyrie eleison*) had been used as a war cry since Byzantine times,[86] and it was still in use up to the 1820s to invoke both God's mercy and God's wrath.[87] The introit of the exaltation of the Cross—"Save oh Lord Thy people / and bless Thine dispensation / grant victories unto [our] kings over the barbarians / and by the power of Thy Cross / preserve Thy habitation"—was sung as something of a "national anthem" in Byzantium and is still often heard in the Orthodox liturgy; it enjoyed a great vogue in the uprising.[88] On 27th March 1821, when Ypsilantis declared the war in Bucharest, the introit of the exaltation of the Cross was sung along with other psalms ("Your grace shone up oh Lord . . ."), followed by the patriotic songs of Rigas Velestinlis, as a priest was offering prayers for the revolutionaries and was blessing their arms and banners in public.[89] In the same vein, the monks of Ithaca welcomed Lord Byron in 1823 with the apparently self-made chant "Christ has risen to elevate the cross and trample on the crescent in our beloved Greece."[90]

80
Kotzageorgis "Clergymen," 336.

81
Joseph Stefanini, *The Personal Sufferings of J. Stefanini* (New York: Vanderpool & Cole, 1829), 50, cited in Gallant, *The Edinburgh History of the Greeks*, 74.

82
Frary, "The Orthodox Church," 489.

83
Cited in Varvarigos, *Thriskeia kai thriskeutiki zoi*, 69.

84
Varvarigos, *Thriskeia kai thriskeutiki zoi*, 69, note 230.

85
Respectively, Ottoman troopers cited from the Quran; see Sophia Laiou and Marinos Saryiannis, "To apomnimoneuma os autoprosopi afigisi. Ta keimena tou Moraiti Yousouf Bey kai tou Kaboutli Vasfi Efenti," in *1821 kai apomnimoneuma. Istoriki chrisi kai istoriografiki gnosi (praktika synderiou)*, ed. Dimitris Dimitropoulos et al. (Athens: Idryma tis voulis ton Ellinon, 2020), 226.

86
John Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565-1204* (London: UCL Press, 1999), 24.

87
Traian Stoianovich, "Prospective: Third and Fourth Levels of History," in Traian Stoianovich, *Between East and West: The Balkan and the Mediterranean Worlds*, vol. 4, *Material Culture and Mentalités: Land, Sea, Destiny* (New Rochelle-New York: A. D. Caratzas, 1995), 107.

88
In his *Brotherly Instruction*, Korais cited the verses of this troparion in full, suggesting implicitly that it refers to the reversal of status of the Ottoman-ruled Greeks. See Korais, *Adelphiki didaskalia*, 44.

89
Elias Photeinos, *Oi athloi tis en Vlachia Ellinikis Epanastaseos to 1821 etos* (Leipzig: n.e., 1846), 73–74.

90
Edward John Trelawny, *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron*, ed. Edward Dowden (London: Humphrey Milford, 1941), 138.

Before the war, the Friendly Society had pushed for the publication of a booklet of prayers for the use of the Greek revolutionary troops. The prayers asked God to protect the leader of the revolution and grant victory to his Christian army: "Let us pray to Lord for the most pious and philochristos Prince, Commissioner General of the Greek and Orthodox nation, Alexandros Constantinos Ypsilantis."[91] Yet more importantly, the prayers were meant to be recounted as parts of the Orthodox liturgy—not as individual prayers. Further on, the prayers ask God to grant victories and glory to "our cross-bearer Prince" and to deploy his army against the enemies "who cannot stand facing the Cross," thereby implicitly equating Muslims with demons.[92] Nationalists couch their ideals in the language and imagery of faith, yet the language and imagery are not foreign to them. They might lean towards radical Enlightenment, political classicism, secularism, atheism or deism, like Korais himself did, yet their beliefs and practices don't cease to be informed by tradition in one way or another.[93] They might be contesting and negotiating the religious values of their time but in doing so they don't necessarily turn out to become atheists or agnostics. In fact, they undergo transition themselves as individuals as much as their societies do. Hence, not infrequently, they strive to find an accommodation between religious and patriotic values not only to mobilise the constituencies singled out as the "national community" but also because they have not entirely forsaken their own religious attachments for new ideologies. Take for example Alexandros Ypsilantis, who chose to unleash the independence war in the Principalities on a day of religious significance. This is at least what he concedes in his private correspondence:

> "My brother [=comrade] Stamatis Koubaris! The time is ripe; the hour has come . . . on the first Sunday of the Holy Lent, on the so-called Sunday of Orthodoxy, I will raise in Jassy the flag of freedom for our homeland . . ."[94]

Contemporary historians may write about Ypsilantis's crossing of the river Pruth and the declaration of the Greek war of independence, but they usually miss the fact that the leader of the Greek revolution in the Principalities did, in fact, declare war on a day of religious celebration. From the believer's viewpoint, action on a day of religious significance would strengthen the plea for God's intercession in the critical undertaking, thus increasing the stakes for success. Had Alexandros Ypsilantis ceased to be a believer as he ferried his revolutionaries across the river? Coming from a different walk of life than that of the Phanariot Ypsilantis, the brave but controversial Greek military leader Gogos Bakolas, attributed the victory he won on a Friday to the intercession and help of the second-century Christian martyr and saint Paraskevi (Parasceva), whose name is identical to the word "Friday" in Greek:

> "I crossed myself and with the help of Saint Paraskevi I killed three thousand Turks with merely sixty comrades in the battle of Stavros and then again [I won] on the day of Saint Paraskevi with one hundred and fifty comrades—that is double the number before—in the battle of Lagada."[95]

Victory would afford troops and leaders the chance to revisit religious ceremony and ritual so as to express their thanks and praises to God. In this light, it is not without importance that Kolokotronis chose to celebrate one of his victories through fasting:

91
[Anonymous], *Synaptai, kai ekteneis, legomenai en kairo polemou* . . . (Jassy: en ti elliniki typographia, 1821) [facsimile reprint by the Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece, Athens 1971], 3. The title "Prince" alludes to Ypsilantis's Phanariot family background. It is also important that their original version of the booklet had been Russian, just like Ypsilantis's former military career.

92
[Anonymous], *Synaptai, kai ekteneis,* 5. The Greek term used in the text is "Σταυροφόρος," which literally means "cross-bearer" but also means "crusader," thereby adding semantic value to the sentence.

93
Zanou, *Transnational Patriotism*, 109–10.

94
Unpublished manuscript of Stamatis Koubaris in Sakellarios G. Sakellariou, *Philiki Etaireia* (Odessa: n.e., 1909), 72.

95
See Nikolaos Kasomoulis, *Enthymimata Stratiotika tis Epanastaseios ton Ellinon, 1821–1833*, ed. Giannis Vlachogiannis (Athens: n.e., 1939), 1:221. In both cases the battle appears to have taken place on a Friday; see Kasomoulis, *Enthymimata Stratiotika tis Epanastaseios ton Ellinon,* 1: note 3, 221.

> "That day [when the battle at Vasilika was won] was Friday and I said that everyone must fast to offer praise to God for the day, and for the victory too, and that it must be praised for the ages of ages, so far as the nation stands up alive, because [that day] meant freedom for the fatherland."[96]

Friday is traditionally a day of fasting for the Orthodox church and Kedourie would have argued here for the "transvaluation of values" and the politicisation of religion.[97] However, the frame of reference of Kolokotronis's thought and action in the case under consideration did not cease to be religious; it was merely expanded to encompass the new meanings brought about by the novel ideology of nationalism. Instead of the politicisation of religion, what one observes in the cases discussed here is the sacralisation of politics.

Nowhere is the sacralisation of the Greek revolution more evident than in the sanctity attributed to the patriots who fell in the war. The glory of self-sacrifice and the idea of overcoming death through posterity are basic elements of nationalist values, myth, and imagery, and the classical past is replete with exemplary individuals who had laid down their own lives, from philosophers like Socrates to generals like Leonidas. Religion, however, purveyed another legacy of exemplary individuals, one focused less on sages and heroes and more on martyrs and saints. This legacy could be held up to reinforce, and frame, the *exempla virtutis* of ancient Greece. Although of Judeo-Christian origin, this frame of reference had parallels in Islam. In this light, it was sanctity that withstood the powers of death. It may be surprising but the first one who framed the execution of Rigas Velestinlis in terms of martyrdom and sanctity was none other than Korais. In his *Brotherly Instruction*, the intellectual leader of the Greek national movement characterised Rigas and his comrades as "martyrs of freedom," lamenting over their "blessed soul" [*makaria psyche*] and their "innocent blood."[98] Writing shortly after the war the judge and intellectual Georgios Tertsetis referred to the fallen patriots as "soldiers of Christ," describing their bodies as "holy relics."[99] Sacralisation, furthermore, purveyed modes of commemoration and ritual focused on veneration and mass reverence. Thus, Lord Byron in the besieged Missolonghi:

> ". . . went to the church dressed in a Greek manner . . . and when the liturgy ended . . . the bishop handed him a sword . . . and Byron wanted to sacralise the sword by leaving it upon the tomb of Marcos Botsaris. The bishop and all the people followed him . . ."[100]

What is subject to veneration in the scene is less the personality of a hero, the fearless Souliot leader Botsaris who had fallen for insurgent Greece and made a name for himself across Europe, and more that of a saint: an individual whom the community has set apart from ordinary men and endowed with supernatural, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities[101]—hence the alleged sacralisation of Byron's sword. Evidently, during the war, death in action was turned into martyrdom for both faith and country. Orthodoxy has a rich tradition of neomartyrs or new martyrs; that is, of men and women who lost their lives at the hands of Muslim Ottomans for refusing to convert to Islam, who unequivocally provided the role model.[102] In his memoirs Fotakos, the man who served Kolokotronis as an aide-de-camp, tells of a moving scene in the aftermath of a bloody battle involving one of his men who remains unnamed:

96
Kolokotronis, *Diigisis*, ιζ'.

97
See the Introduction in Kedourie, *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*, 1–147.

98
"Now [Rigas and comrades] may be standing shackled before the tyrant, those brave martyrs of freedom. Now the executioner's axe may be falling upon their sacred heads and the bold Greek blood may be pouring out of their veins, their blessed soul may be flying high above so that to join the souls of all those [men] of everlasting renown who gave their lives for freedom. Yet the spilling out of this innocent blood . . ."; see Korais, *Adelphiki didaskalia,* IV-V. In terms of imagery and symbolism, Korais here draws equally on religious and civic traditions.

99
In his introduction to the memoirs of Kolokotronis; see Kolokotronis, *Diigisis*, ι΄; Cf. also, ζ'.

100
Koumas, *Oi Ellines*, 647.

101
Joep Leerssen quoting Max Weber on charisma; see Joep Leerssen, "Sacral States: The Politics of Worship, Religious and Secular," in *The Great Immortality: Studies on European Cultural Sainthood*, ed. Marijan Dović and Jón Karl Helgason (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 25.

102
Nomikos Michael Vaporis, *Witnesses for Christ: Orthodox Christian Neomartyrs of the Ottoman Period, 1437-1860* (St Vladimir's Seminary, 2000). For a background of Christian neomartyrdom before the rise of the Ottomans, see Christian C. Sahner, *Christian Martyrs under Islam Religious Violence and the Making of the Muslim World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018). Comparatively, for the concepts of martyr and martyrdom from the viewpoint of Ottoman Islam, see Paul Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1938).

"He came to me in tears and said behold! Here is the head of my brother. Then I said to him, don't cry for your brother is now a saint and there's now a saint descending from your family. Go now, find his body and bury it."[103]

103
Photios Chrysanthopoulos, *Apomnimoneumata peri tis Ellinikis Epanastaseos* (Athens: Sakellariou, 1858), 105–6, cf. 126.

What the war itself had effected was a remarkable shift from the personality cult of a given hero-saint to the cult of the unnamed masses of fallen patriots who were endowed with the aura of saintly charisma, thereby providing inspiration to society and a lasting reservoir of moral pride for the generations to come.

Conclusions

The Patriarchal anathema on the Greek Revolution, the republican anti-clericalism of a sizeable part of the Greek nationalist movement, and the clash of religious and secular ideas before the independence war did not usher in the detachment of large groups of Greeks from religious values and practices, nor did they help to forge a Greek national identity with anti-Christian and anti-Church characteristics. Religion came to meet patriotism within the bosom of the Friendly Society as the movement for Greek independence enjoyed wider social dissemination and faced increasing membership demands. Once the war broke out, nationalism and religion overlapped and reinforced each other in multiple ways. The agents of imbrication between the two were, on the one hand, the political and military leaders of the insurgents and, on the other, the clergy and monks who had aligned themselves with the Greek cause. Actively confronting the Muslims as enemies brought them together and transformed them both. The tie between nationality and faith, hammered out successively by the Greek constitution of 1822 and that of 1823, was but one means of sacralising the Greek revolution. The others involved religiously induced violence, modes of ceremony and ritual focused on veneration and mass reverence, production of new religious literature adjusted to war purposes, action on days of religious significance, religious rites and celebrations for patriotic purposes, transfer of religious practices (hymn chanting) and concepts (martyrdom) to the war culture and, finally, the quasi-sanctification of the bodies of the fallen patriots. The sacralisation of the revolutionary process forged a liturgical-collective commitment to the values of the nation. Within this frame of reference, agonistic valour sprung from faith, self-sacrifice for the community was endowed with awe and reverence, while death radiated powerfully the belief in resurrection and regeneration both individual and collective.

Andrzej Towiański. Between Catholic Esotericism and Political Messianism

Giulio Dalla Grana

Centro Studi
di Civiltà e Spiritualità
Comparate
fondazione
Giorgio Cini onlus

Giulio Dalla Grana
University of Turin
giulio.dallagrana@unito.it
University of Amsterdam
g.dallagrana@uva.nl

Keywords:
Andrzej Towiański, Polish messianism, Catholic esotericism, Romantic nationalism, Political religion

To cite this:
Dalla Grana, Giulio. "Andrzej Towiański. Between Catholic Esotericism and Political Messianism." *Religiographies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2023): 38–57.

Abstract

The aim of this article is to show the relationship between Catholic Esotericism and Romantic nationalism through the study of Andrzej Towiański's thought. Towiański based his thought on a Messianic idea, promoting a nationalism sustained by a heterodox current of a faith often endorsed as a State religion. The esoteric features of Towiański's religious ideas placed his doctrine outside the typical Romantic nationalist frameworks. Towiański's doctrine intertwined the concepts of nation, nation-State, Roman Catholic Church, and Roman Catholic faith to form a particular, and controversial, political doctrine. In order to describe a religion-based approach to Romantic nationalism, this article analyses the main Towianist religious ideas, two instances of their nationalistic outcomes, and the political traits of Towiański's religious conceptions.

1. Introduction: Andrzej Towiański and Polish Messianism

Polish Romanticism can be seen as a period when philosophical, political, and religious ideas were seen as a response to the moral, social, and national hopes of Poles, a period that saw the emergence of a form of messianic thought promoted by several personalities who identified Poland as the "Christ of nations." Arising between the November Uprising of 1830 and the January Uprising of 1863, Polish messianism evolved from the "high spiritual aspirations of a politically deprived nation"[1] which, dismembered by Prussia, Russia, and Austria, saw itself as the Twelve Tribes of Israel: divided in their own country and exiled around Europe. The former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was understood by the Polish *intelligencja* as sharing the same suffering and expectations of the European national-liberal uprisings, but also as tasked with establishing a new reality in the post-Napoleonic order, redeeming humanity after all the grief caused and endured.[2]

In this context, the notion of nation can be expressed through Zygmunt Krasiński's words: "The name of nation can be only conferred to that aggregation of alive and associated spirits, which in itself construed of the goal towards which it struggles, this aim being humanity in the supreme sense of the term."[3] Unlike other political entities, nations were perceived as sentient beings created by God. Therefore, they possessed the concepts of past, present, and future and had existential purposes. However, these purposes could only be pursued through the immanent realisation of the nation as a political entity. What is national is subjected to the universal, but the universal progress of humanity is directly correlated with the establishment and progress of individual nations. This concept, the pillar of progressivist Romanticism, is perfectly explained in the 17th article of the Young Europe manifesto by Giuseppe Mazzini:

Note on the authors: Uncredited authors and native authors' names are included within square brackets.

1 Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *Historia filozofii* [History of Philosophy] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2009), 2:259.

2 Andrzej Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism. The Case of Poland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 239–46.

3 Zygmunt Krasiński, "O stanowisku Polski z Bożych i ludzkich względów" [On the Status of Poland in the Divine and Human Regards], in *Pisma Zygmunta Krasińskiego. Wydanie jubileuszowe* [Zygmunt Krasiński's Collected Works. Anniversary Edition], vol. 7, *Pisma filozoficzne i polityczne* [Philosophical and Political Works] (Krakow: Gebethner i Spółka—Gebethner i Wolff, 1912), 71.

"Every people has its special mission, which will co-operate towards the fulfilment of the general mission of humanity. That mission constitutes its nationality. Nationality is sacred."[4] Polish Messianism can be understood as a current of progressivist Romanticism, simplistically labelled by Hans Kohn as a "Romantic nationalism based on the veneration of a past without foundation in the present."[5] This irrational component, almost overlooked by Eric J. Hobsbawm's materialistic approach,[6] was the basis of the entire Polish intellectual production of both reactionary and progressivist thinkers, as Andrzej Walicki has underlined.[7]

In this historiosophical scenario, on the 27th of September 1841, Andrzej Towiański (1799–1878) delivered a speech before the Polish emigration gathered at Notre Dame de Paris, announcing the coming of a "Higher Christian Epoch," identified by him as the intermediate step towards the Kingdom of God. The religious-political ideas and social structure of the Towianist community can be defined as a "mystical-chiliastic Christian heterodoxy."[8] Concerning the subject of this study, however, it is worth noting that the strict adherence of Towiański's thought to the philosophical category of Polish Messianism, and its messianic character, was questioned as early as 1918 by Maria Bersano Begey[9] and more recently by Marlis Lami.[10]

Xylopgraphy of Andrzej Towiański by Jan Styfi. Biblioteka Narodowa w Warszawie, G.28873/I.

4
Joseph [Giuseppe] Mazzini, "Pact of Fraternity of the Young Europe," in *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini,* vol. 3, *Autobiographical and Political* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1891), 33.

5
Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism. Its History and Ideology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 30.

6
Cf. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution. 1789–1848* (New York: New American Library, 1962). Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

7
Cf. Andrzej Walicki, *Między filozofią, religią i polityka. Studia o myśli polskiej epoki romantyzmu* [Between Philosophy, Religion, and Politics. Studies on Polish Thought of the Romantic Epoch] (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1983). Brian Porter, "Thy Kingdom Come. Patriotism, Prophecy, and the Catholic Hierarchy in Nineteenth-Century Poland," *The Catholic Historical Review* 89, no. 2 (2003): 213–39.

8
Andrzej Walicki, "Millenaryzm i mesjanizm religijny a romantyczny mesjanizm polski. Zarys problematyki," [Millenarianism and Religious Messianism versus Polish Romantic Messianism. Outlines of problems] *Pamiętnik Literacki* 64, no. 4 (1971): 30.

9
Maria Bersano Begey, *Vita e pensiero di Andrea Towiański (1799–1878)* [Life and Thought of Andrzej Towiański] (Milano: Editrice Milanese, 1918), 320–30.

10
Marlis Lami, "Mesjanizm bez mesjasza?" [Messianism without a Messiah?] *44. Czterdzieści i Cztery. Magazyn Apokaliptyczny* 12 (2021): 203–26.

1.1. The Towianist Community

In 1828 and 1839, Towiański saw two Marian apparitions in the Bernardine Church of Wilno. These apparitions revealed to him the coming of a new epoch. In 1840, Towiański travelled to Paris, the centre of the Polish emigration after the November Uprising. Nonetheless, Towiański did not take part in the Polish revolution. He voluntarily left his fatherland to join his exiled compatriots and preach the divine message received in Wilno.

Towiański called his mission the Cause of God.[11] According to him, the Cause of God was started by Jesus Christ himself. But both the Church and humanity forgot his teachings. Towiański felt it was his duty to revive the mission of Jesus Christ and struggle for its accomplishment on earth. Nonetheless, to implement the divine design, he needed the support of other earthly forces: people who truly wanted to seek a perfect union with God, and specific nations identified as the depository of God's Will.

Between 1841 and 1842, a Towianist Circle composed of dozens of disciples took shape in Paris. Among Towiański's disciples were notable Polish personalities such as the poets Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849), and Seweryn Goszczyński (1801–1876); insurgents of the November Uprising, namely Ludwik Nabielak (1804–1883), Karol Różycki (1789–1870), and Mikołaj Kamieński (1799–1873); and the diplomat Aleksander Chodźko (1804–1891).

In the following years, Towiański's charisma attracted several Frenchmen, especially among the members of Pierre-Michel-Eugène Vintras' *Œuvre de la Miséricorde* (Cause of Mercy); numerous Italians belonging to the Piedmontese cultural élite; and Jews and Protestants who converted to Catholicism after having met Towiański. Three main Towianist Circles formed the core of the Towianist community, in Paris, Zurich, and Turin. Other minor Circles were present in Europe and were mostly connected to Towianist families or had a limited number of disciples. Notably, the Circles survived Towiański's death and even multiplied in Italy between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century.[12]

Towiański promoted a doctrine that, although he always claimed its compliance with the Catholic faith, incorporated several religious concepts that can be found in Jewish mysticism and ancient Christian heterodox doctrines, alongside philosophical and social ideas of the late Enlightenment and the Romantic period.[13] Essentially, Towiański's doctrine aimed for social renewal through the strict observance of its principles. Towianism stressed the need to pursue spiritual perfectionism to achieve an improvement of reality from an eschatological perspective. According to Towiański, this spiritual perfectionism can only be attained through a total and intimate union with God, to awaken the "Christian tone" which can lead to the accomplishment of true Christian acts in private and public life.

Towiański's doctrine has several characteristics that fit into the concept of "Western" esotericism:[14] the initiatory nature of the Towianist community, the secrecy of Towiański's teachings, the divine intervention that produced a revelation, and the reprisal of a forgotten tradition. Already in the first decades of the twentieth century, Paul Sédir's *Les Amitiés Spirituelles* identified Towiański as a national initiator:[15] an archetype of "the emissaries of the Light"[16] who embodied ancient Rosicrucian knowledge.

11
This name refers to two verses of the New Testament: "*Notum a saeculo est Domino opus suum*" (Acts, XV:18) and "*Dicit eis Jesus: Meus cibus est ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me, ut perficiam opus ejus*" (John, IV:34).

12
Alessandro Zussini, *Andrzej Towianski. Un riformatore polacco in Italia* [Andrzej Towiański. A Polish Reformer in Italy] (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 1970), 155–84.

13
Specifically on Towiański's thought, see Adam Sikora, *Towiański i rozterki romantyzmu* [Towiański and the Dilemmas of Romanticism] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Wiedza Powszechna, 1969). Walentyna Horoszkiewiczówna, *Etyka Towiańskiego. Jej źródła i promieniowanie* [Towiański's Ethics. Its Sources and Its Spread] (Wilno: Nakładem Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 1938).

14
Concerning this problematic definition, see Francesco Baroni, "Storia dell'esoterismo e storia delle religioni. Mappatura di un campo di ricerca e prospettive teoriche," [History of Esotericism and History of Religions. Mapping of a Research Field and Theoretical Perspectives] *Egeria* 11, no. 16 (2022): 59–79. Helmut Zander, "What Is Esotericism? Does It Exist? How Can It Be Understood?", in *Occult Roots of Religious Studies. On the Influence of Non-Hegemonic Currents on Academia around 1900*, ed. Yves Mühlematter and Helmut Zander (Oldenbourg: DeGuyter, 2021), 14–43.

15
[Paul] Sédir, *Le martyre de la Pologne* (Paris: Éditions Georges Crès et Cie, 1917), 37.

16
"André Towianski et le christianisme spirituel," *Les Amitiés Spirituelles*, no. 37 (1937).

1.2. Roman Catholic Church and Romantic Nationalism

The devotion to the Roman Catholic faith of the majority of the Polish emigration, alongside liberal-national Romantic ideas, inevitably produced tension with Rome.

After the French Revolution, the Church became aware of a new order that, under the pretext of affirming the rights of freedom and equality, wanted to eradicate Christianity. Following the Congress of Vienna, three main currents emerged in Europe: the alliance of throne and altar, which sought a balance between the jurisdictionalist policies of the States and the privileges of the clergy; an intransigent reactionary Catholicism, which saw in the papal theocracy the only remedy against revolutionary attempts; and a liberal-Catholic stance which considered liberal-nationalist ideas and the teachings of the Gospel to be compatible.

The Roman Curia of the nineteenth century included supporters of each of these currents. However, the first stance was the one promoted, pursued, and implemented by the Holy See. Gregorious XVI's encyclical *Cum primum* on the 9th of June 1832, which condemned the November Uprising, was the apex of this policy's results. The Church's endeavours to maintain the *status quo* in Europe after the Restoration clashed dramatically with Poland's national aspirations, and with those of other Catholic nations. Indeed, from the Church's perspective, being patriotic, which meant recognising the existence of nations and fighting for their political establishment, implied being against the State of the Church and in favour of the Italian nation.[17] Hence against the Holy Alliance, which guaranteed the State of the Church's territorial integrity and ruled over various nations which sought their independence. Promoting an end to the Pontifical temporal power was thus perceived as opposing the Roman Catholic Church and as supporting the earthly rule of people and nations instead of divinely inspired monarchies and the Church.

While progress, and the concept of nationality, were opposed by institutional Catholicism, Towiański believed that the teachings of Jesus Christ complied with these stances. Although Towiański also promoted religious concepts rather typical of reactionary Catholic thinkers, he could theoretically adhere to the liberal Catholic current. Nonetheless, Towiański was not a political philosopher. He saw himself as the depositary of a divine mission consecrated by a heavenly vision. In his writings, the absence of any form of explicit and systematic political thought is pervasive. In Towiański's thought, progress did not imply the simple earthly aspect promoted by the various progressivist political thinkers of the nineteenth century; it coincided with striving for the redemption and salvation of humanity. For Towiański, the progress of humanity and individual spiritual progress were deeply intertwined because the former was understood as the consequence of the latter. Towiański's doctrine thus expresses the conjunction of progressivist political aims and religious renewal: the political affirmation of nations and the inauguration of a Roman Church embodying the original teachings of Jesus Christ. Similar to other religious reformers of the nineteenth century, Towiański tried to obtain pontifical approval for his doctrine. Like his predecessors, he was opposed by the reactionary faction of the Roman Curia, which identified him as a promotor of dangerous heterodox doctrines[18] and as a political agitator. Although Towiański did not have the support of the Holy See, the Towianists believed that God was on their side.

17
Francesco Traniello, "Religione, nazione e sovranità nel Risorgimento italiano" [Religion, Nation, and Sovereignty in Italian Risorgimento] *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 28, no. 2 (1992): 319–68.

18
Initially, Towiański's main adversaries were the priests of the Congregation of the Resurrection. Later, several members of the Italian clergy also opposed Towiański. The main books that attacked Towiański were: Pierre [Piotr] Semenenko, *Towianski et sa doctrine jugeś par l'enseignement de l'église* (Paris: Sagnier et Bray, 1850). Orazio Premoli, *Andrea Towianski (1799–1878). Contributo alla storia del misticismo contemporaneo* [Andrzej Towiański (1799–1878). A Contribution to the History of Contemporary Mysticism] (Roma: Libreria Editrice Religiosa Francesco Ferrari, 1914).

2. Exotericism and Esotericism in Towiański's Teachings

During his life, Towiański never published anything in first person. Indeed, he devoted the last years of his life to revising the notes that expressed his teachings to his disciples. While Towiański was alive, however, his disciples published, in Turin and Paris, a few pamphlets on him and his mission. After his death, *Pisma Andrzeja Towiańskiego* (Andrzej Towiański's Collected Works) and *Kilka aktów i dokumentów odnoszących się do działalności Andrzeja Towiańskiego* (Several Acts and Documents Concerning the Activities of Andrzej Towiański) were published, respectively in Turin and Rome.

Towiański's teachings reveal exoteric and esoteric dimensions. The Towianists truly wanted to avoid any doctrinal-theological criticism from Church authorities, and they published Towiański's teachings to expressly show their goodness and piety.[19] Although the Towianists tried to hide any heterodoxy in Towiański's religious ideas, his esoteric doctrine is immediately recognisable in certain sentences and concepts[20] alongside certain ritualistic practices.[21] Moreover, since Towiański's writings were published after his death by his closest adepts, his teachings could only be obtained via an oral tradition, according to which a few Towianists decided what should be disclosed.

A typical Towianist volume. Photograph © G.D.G. Biblioteca Erik Peterson, Fondo Towiansky, THEO7.24. This volume, owned by the Rostagno family, crossed three generations and was presumably crafted and edited between 1868 and 1934. It contains dozens of manuscripts, letters, pamphlets, and pictures. Usually, the Towianists transcribed and translated their letters and pamphlets in order to diffuse them to other members of the Circles. Successively, the material was bind together in large volumes or pocket books.

Towiański's message attracted numerous followers, mainly among Poles, Frenchmen, Italians, and Jews. Towiański's disciples were usually people striving for their national independence, seeking religious renewal, or frustrated by the social and political situation of nineteenth-century Europe. One of the reasons why Towiański's teachings fascinated many people was certainly, alongside his religious doctrine, the role attributed to their nation, and, therefore, their active part in history to perfect and save humanity.

References to nations and their role can often and vaguely be found in Towianist publications. The main *corpus* of texts Towiański specifically dedicated to the topic is the first part of the third volume of his collected works, which is divided into five sections concerning Poland, Russia, France, Italy, and Israel. In order to shed some light on Towiański's thought and on the relationship between Esoteric Catholicism and Romantic nationalism, we will analyse some Towianist extracts.

19 Marlis Lami analysed the Towianist publications and their editors in: Marlis Lami, *Andrzej Towiański (1799–1878). Ein religiöser Reformer im europäischen Kontext seiner Zeit* [Andrzej Towiański (1799–1878). A Religious Reformer in the European Context of His Time] (Göttingen: V&R Unipress—Vienna University Press, 2019), 23–100.

20 Giulio Dalla Grana, "Esoteric Resonances in Towiański's Thought," *The Polish Review* 65, no. 4 (2020): 3–22.

21 Lami, *Andrzej Towiański*, 224–30.

2.1. Polish Nation in Towiański's Paris Speeches

In the last months of 1841, Towiański appeared in public in Paris and gave two speeches. The first was given at the archcathedral of Notre Dame; the second, at the church of Saint Séverin.

In Notre Dame, Towiański's speech was attended by part of the Polish emigration. Due to its public nature, and because it was the first public appearance of Towiański in France, the speech reveals the main exoteric points of the message he allegedly received in Wilno.

> "I come to announce to you the time of the Lord's Jubilee, in which it is easier for man to obtain God's Grace and, with its help, to free himself from slavery, to be reborn and live as a Christian. Let me announce to you the Higher Christian Epoch, which is opening in the world today, and the Cause of God that initiates man into this epoch. I come to introduce you to this work, to facilitate and to cooperate with you in fulfilling our important vocation that God destined in a ten-year retreat in a foreign land to prepare you as the sons of a superior Christian nation. [. . .] And you brothers, defenders, and martyrs of freedom, prepared by the sufferings of exile and wandering, you are the first to participate in this great Cause of God's mercy, the cause of salvation and progress of humankind!"[22]

Towiański defines the Cause of God as the "cause of salvation and progress of humankind." Although he identifies Poles as the chosen people to accomplish his mission, he clearly points out that, to fulfil their "vocation," they must accept his help. That being said, the reason for being chosen is related to something more than forced exile. Towiański concluded the speech with these words:

> "In the Cause of God, the whole great future of Poland, our fatherland, is defined. Because our nation, which faithfully preserved Christianity in its souls through the ages, is called by the Cause of God to apply Christianity in its private and public life. [. . .] This vocation is shared by some other nations. However, Poland, as an outstanding part of the Slavic tribe, which preserved in its soul the treasure of Christ's fire, the treasure of love and feeling, more purely and vividly than other tribes, is the cornerstone of the rising Cause of God, the cause of the salvation of the world."[23]

The particularity of the Polish people is underlined again in the speech delivered at the church of Saint Séverin. Towiański tasked one of his disciples, the painter Walenty Wańkowicz (1799–1842), with depicting Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn, and placed it in one of the church's chapels. During the inauguration, Towiański stated:

> "Oh, Slavic soul! Because of your simplicity, you have the ability to understand the voice of the Lord. In the past ages, amid general contamination, you kept your Christian seed pure. Bear witness to that. And the merit of your fidelity to Christ, our Lord, will soon satisfy you."[24]

When analysing these two speeches, it must be stressed that Towiański was

22 [Andrzej Towiański], "Słowa sługi Bożego" [The Words of the Servant of God], in *Pisma Andrzeja Towiańskiego* [Andrzej Towiański's Collected Works], ed. Stanisław Falkowski and Karol Baykowski (Turin: Nakładem Wydawców, 1882), 1:25–26.

23 [Towiański], "Słowa sługi Bożego," 28.

24 [Towiański], "Wedzwane do emigracyi polskiej" [The Call to the Polish Emigration] in *Pisma*, 1:30.

specifically addressing the Polish emigration, underlining the role that the Polish nation had in his revelation. That said, Towiański's message was not restricted to Poles only.

2. 2. Biesiada and the Spiritual Battle

The most known and criticised text by Towiański is *Biesiada* (The Banquet). The manuscript was drafted in Waterloo, during the Yuletide of 1840, for the initiation of General Jan Skrzynecki (1787–1860), former commander in chief of the November Uprising. In 1843, the Polish priest Aleksander Jełowicki obtained the manuscript from Skrzynecki and lithographed it to denounce Towiański's doctrine. Although Towiański recognised the authorship of the text, he did not stand by its contents since it consisted of loose notes that could not properly convey his ideas. The revised version of *Biesiada* was not published until 1882, in Towiański's collected works,[25] and it differed enormously from Jełowicki's lithographed version.

Biesiada expresses the Towianist cosmology and Towiański's fundamental concept of metempsychosis. In the pamphlet, Towiański explains that the world is surrounded by evil Lower Spirits organised in columns of darkness and good Higher Spirits directly descended from heaven through columns of light. For Towiański, man is able to attract those columns through evil or good actions. Thanks to the aid of these columns, man's soul could attain a new life depending on the column he attracted.

In the text, Towiański prophesied that a battle between the Lower and the Higher Spirits was soon to come, and that the descending column of light was going to illuminate the world.[26] Nonetheless, this heavenly column of light would not descend on all nations, only a chosen few.

> "However, following the example of our terrestrial light which enlightens some [nations] while it leaves other countries in the twilight, and others still in the deepest darkness and cold; the celestial light will also undergo this destiny. Amid the jubilee of grace, the fire burning the chosen and prepared nations will not cast upon others even the faintest ray."[27]

For Towiański, the battle that would cast the heavenly fire on earth through the Higher Spirits was guided by the spirit of an individual who had cast another kind of fire all over Europe a few decades before: "And you, spirit of Napoleon, by a special privilege, you are the one before the last [God] in this holy column. You are allowed to live, to act on earth, without ceasing to be a pure spirit."[28] Napoleon, alongside other leaders such as Kościuszko, is a crucial figure in Towiański's thought. Napoleon is seen by Towiański as a precursor of the Cause of God. He was able to attract the column of light and began the fight against the Lower Spirits. Nevertheless, he was later corrupted by these Spirits, and he surrendered to their temptations. Instead of realising the Cause, he started to pursue personal interests. After Napoleon's death, his spirit began to redeem itself by contributing to the fight against darkness.[29]

In *Biesiada*, Towiański never mentions the Polish nation or any other political matter. However, from a national-revolutionary interpretation of Towiański's words, all the liberal-national insurrectionary attempts pursued after the Congress of Vienna can be perceived as intensifying the battle between the Higher and Lower Spirits, respectively identified as the people who were against the political order imposed by the Restoration. Napoleon,

25
[Towiański], "Biesiada z Janem Skrzyneckim" [The Banquet with Jan Skrzynecki] in *Pisma*, 1:1–21.

26
[Andrzej Towiański], *Banquet du 17 janvier 1841* (Paris: Libraire de N. Béchet fils, [1844]), 10–11. "It is in the middle of the nineteenth century that You, oh Lord, have reserved this honour, this joy, this phenomenon unknown to the world."

27
[Towiański], *Banquet*, 11.

28
[Towiański], *Banquet*, 14.

29
[Adam Mickiewicz, Andzej Towiański], *Współudział Adama Mickiewicza w sprawie Andrzeja Towiańskiego* [Adam Mickiewicz's Participation in the Cause of Andzej Towiański] (Paris: Księgarnia Luxemburgska, 1877), 2:293–338.

who forced an unnatural State-building process in Europe, was still pursuing the same mission. While the national aims of the European people were supported by the column of light, there is a curious synchronicity between the revolutionary attempts of 1848 and Towiański's prophecy. Indeed, Towiański's support for national causes is not a matter of interpretation. In *Biesiada*, three toasts conclude the text. The first toast asserts unequivocally the commitment of Towiański's doctrine to liberal-national struggles: "God! Allow this earthly expression of the Cause of the Spirit to be approved by your glory: [. . .] For the prosperity of the holiest cause of the people; for the prosperity of our fatherland!"[30]

30 [Towiański], *Banquet*, 15.

2.3. The Triple Sacrifice

The Triple Sacrifice (or Christian Sacrifice) is another cornerstone of Towiański's doctrine. It can be identified as the main Towianist practice aimed at improving the spirit and its concrete outcome. Towiański always stressed the necessity of applying the law of Jesus Christ in private and public life, and the Triple Sacrifice was the means to do so. The actions and behaviour of the individual, one of the spirits that form the nation, are the main factors in shaping the community. In *Biesiada*, Towiański underlined the following: "For the merits of a single righteous man, God spares a country, a city. For this righteous one, because of his inner purity, [God] conveys a column of light which defends this country, this city from the deeds of evil."[31]

31 [Towiański], *Banquet*, 13.

The sacrifice is trifold because it results from three different practices that involve spirit, body, and actions. The Triple Sacrifice is defined as:

> "The movement of the Spirit into the Spirit, into the body, and into the action. According to how the spirit positions itself, the body becomes free, and it manifests itself through action. This is Christianity. This is the progressive accomplishment of the Divine Word made by simple people who became fool for Christ."[32]

32 Andrzej Towiański, "Wielki Period" [The Great Period], in *Wybór pism i nauk* [Selected Works and Teachings], ed. Stanisław Pigoń (Breslaw: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich—De Agostini Polska, 2004), 87.

The Triple Sacrifice is explained in a text that describes a meeting between Towiański and his son. The sacrifice of spirit is the first step towards the fulfilment of the Triple Sacrifice. It consists in progressively elevating the spirit through the power of loving God:

> "Be strong in yourself, focus, lift and adjust your spirit to the tone that Christ the Lord has shown in his whole life and gave to man, so that he would rise to this tone for centuries. In this work, humble yourself, crumble before God, awake love, affection, tenderness, move, animate and enlighten yourself internally; reach calm, inner peace."[33]

33 [Towiański], "Noty zebrane przez Adama Towiańskiego z kilku rozmów jego z ojcem" [Notes Collected by Adam Towiański from Several Conversations with His Father], in *Pisma*, 1:57.

The second step, the sacrifice of body, is to live according to the spirit, prepared and elevated by its sacrifice. In an Augustinian way, Towiański suggests: "Bring your spirit into the body, penetrate, enliven the body with this tone, these feelings, the life that you have awakened in your spirit."[34] The final step, the sacrifice of action, is the externalisation of the previous sacrifices. It represents the concrete Christianisation of life, the application of the teachings of Jesus Christ with body and soul in every aspect of existence, in every private moment, and in every social interaction.

34 [Towiański], "Noty zebrane przez Adama Towiańskiego," 58.

Yet, the Triple Sacrifice is not merely a personal spiritual exercise.

As Stanisław Szpotański observed through the analysis of Swedenborg's thought, the Triple Sacrifice can be understood as the concrete realisation of the biblical passage *love thy neighbour as thyself*.[35]

Love and sacrifice are two crucial interconnected points for Towianism. According to Towiański, the essential starting point is the love of God, because only love empowers one to endure any effort or pain. Love is the spiritual elevation that reaches toward the aim. Sacrifice is the product of love; it consists in any action that could concretely realise love. For Towiański, these two key points are the essence of Christianity. Love is what drives progress; sacrifice is the means by which it can be accomplished. In this way, the Triple Sacrifice can be understood as the Towianist practice that enables moving from the individual to the nation, and the related infusion of Christian values from the lower, individual-microcosmic level to the higher, national-macrocosmic level.

35
Stanisław Szpotański, *Andrzej Towiański. Jego życie i nauka* [Andrzej Towiański. His Life and Teachings] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Kasy im. Mianowskiego, 1938), 70–95.

2.4. Wielki Period and the Three Israels

The fundamental text that discloses Towiański's national conceptions is *Wielki Period* (The Great Epoch). While *Biesiada* was a small notebook given to a single individual, *Wielki Period* aimed at systematising the revelation received in Wilno and disclosing a further level of initiation into Towiański's doctrine for adepts. The manuscript was drafted by Towiański in Solothurn between 1843 and 1844, and it was successively destroyed by Towiański himself. The text was never published, and it could only be transmitted orally in Towianist meetings.[36] Nonetheless, it is possible to see in Mickiewicz's lectures at Collège de France numerous similarities with the topics discussed in the manuscript and those in *Biesiada*.[37]

In the first part of the text, Towiański stresses the importance of spiritual improvement realised through the Triple Sacrifice, affirming that humanity and the world can be improved only through a higher transformation in the individual spirit. According to Towiański, this world is merely a sphere interconnected with other spheres. In the lower sphere, *Wielki Period* identifies antagonist of humanity. Similar to a Manichean viewpoint, while the Higher Spirits, inhabiting the higher sphere, are emanations of light by God and intermediated by Jesus Christ, the Lower Spirits, corrupted by Satan and wandering in the lower sphere, are subordinated by the Spirit of the Earth. However, Towiański does not give any proper definition of the Spirit of the Earth. He merely states that it opposes the Cause of Jesus Christ.

The most important section of *Wielki Period* concerns Israel. Numerous points of Towiański's teachings present similarities with Kabbalist doctrines.[38] The Towianists had a very strong interest in the Jews, and they tried on several occasions to preach the Cause to them[39] because Israel was identified as the "first-born son"[40] of God. For Towiański, Israel had a metaphysical significance: "Israel, the higher part of the terrestrial globe, is predestined to march ahead on the path of the Lord. [. . .] The holy Cause will be realised for Israel and by Israel."[41] When Towiański writes about Israel, he does not mean a geographical territory. Israel is a feature of the spirit of certain nations. It can be intended as that part of the spirit which preserves the pure Christian spark, that part elected for a covenant with God.

Towiański describes how Israel was subjugated by the Spirit of the Earth over the centuries. But the coming of the Higher Christian Epoch

36
Towiański, "Wielki Period," 78–83.

37
Stanisław Pigoń, " 'Biesiada' Towiańskiego i jej komentarz w IV kursie 'Prelekcji paryskich' Adama Mickiewicza" [Towiański's "The Banquet" and Its Commentary in the 4th Course of Mickiewicz's "Paris Lectures"], in *Z epoki Mickiewicza. Studja i szkice* [In Mickiewicz's Epoch. Studies and Outlines] (Leopolis: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1922), 241–97.

38
Stanisław Pigoń, "Towiański na Litwie (II)" [Towiański in Lithuania], *Przegląd Współczesny*, no. 126 (1932): 66–68. Cf. Marlis Lami, *Andrzej Towiański und die jüdische Mystik des 19. Jahrhunderts* [Andrzej Towiański and the Jewish Mysticism of the Nineteenth Century] (Vienna: Polnische Akademie der Wissenschaften—Wissenschaftliches Zentrum in Wien, 2017).

39
Abraham G. Duker, "The Mystery of the Jew in Mickiewicz's Towianist Lectures on Slav Literature," *Polish Review* 7, no. 4 (1962): 40–66. Cf. Attille Begey, *André Towiański et Israël. Actes et documents (1842–1864)* (Rome: G. Romagna Et C., 1912).

40
[Towiański], "Trzy listy do Feliksa N." [Three Letters to Feliks N.], in *Pisma*, 3:77.

41
Towiański, "Wielki Period," 90–91.

was awakening Israel from its slumber. Towiański prophesied that "Israel will reveal itself on the true day, and it will become the foundation of the Kingdom of God on earth."[42] According to Towiański, there are three Israels called Minister-Nations. These three nations are related to the concrete implementation of the Cause of God: Israel-Jew, which "does not cease to worship the Spirit of the Earth, it breaks the chains through the exaltation of the Lord, [. . .] and start to gather near the fireplace of the Lord";[43] Israel-French, which "breaks the chains of the Spirit of the Earth, it comes back to a pure exaltation, [. . .] it realises the Cause";[44] and Israel-Slav, which "releases itself from the entrapment of the body and of the Earth [. . .] exalts itself, and [. . .] dominates and elevates its land through the fruit of the exaltation."[45] The concatenated action of the three Israels forms Israel-Universal. When Israel is finally freed from the Spirit of the Earth, its spirit will "lead Israel to the heavenly and earthly Jerusalem."[46]

Furthermore, Towiański outlines a list of duties that must be fulfilled by the Minister-Nations. Essentially, these duties concern the union of the three Israels and the spiritual elevation towards God. The fifth point is very relevant for understanding Towiański's thought on nations: "Arrange, establish in these fireplaces of the fatherland a free life, in the private and public affairs according to the species of the spirit, and this love of the Fatherland and of freedom will be a praise to the Lord."[47] Although the reference to the Christianisation of private and public life is widespread in all Towianist texts, it is noteworthy that this duty is explicitly reserved to the Minister-Nations.

42
Towiański, "Wielki Period," 113.

43
Towiański, "Wielki Period," 113.

44
Towiański, "Wielki Period," 113. In "Biesiada," Towiański mentioned France on just one occasion: "And even today, France presents, if not a luminous point, at least a grey point amid the darkness of the globe. And this [France] is already the elementary, progressive development of Your merciful thought, oh God!", *Banquet*, 11. By contrast, *Biesiada* published in *Pisma* devoted more space to the mission of France, identifying Napoleon as "the greatest Israel-man of modern times." "Biesiada z Janem Skrzyneckim," in *Pisma*, 1:13–6.

45
Towiański, "Wielki Period," 113.

46
Towiański, "Wielki Period," 114.

47
Towiański, "Wielki Period," 112.

3. Political Complications

While the Polish nation, alongside the French and Jewish nations, was perceived as the depository of God's Will, the Towianists soon faced the political paradoxes of actions aimed at the concrete application of Jesus Christ's law on earth. Concerning the national dialectic, Towiański's doctrine faced two issues: Polish relations with Russia and the rise of the Italian question in European international politics.

3.1. The Russian Dilemma

In the first pages of *Biesiada*, Towiański states, "Nowadays, a single Lower Spirit shakes and perturbs whole Russia."[48] After the repression of the November Uprising, Russia was identified as Poland's main enemy. Nevertheless, Towiański did not perceive Russia as an enemy, but as a nation corrupted by the Spirit of the Earth and unaware of the damage it was doing to the Polish nation. That being said, Russia, a Slavic nation, was part of Israel-Slav and was destined to fulfil the Cause of God alongside Poland. The Towianist view of Polish-Russian relations can be understood through the progression of the Triple Sacrifice. Russia was perceived as a neighbour to be elevated, as a brother to rescue from the wrong path. As Christian love had to be transmitted from the individual to the nation, it had to be transferred from one nation to another on an international level.

There are several Towianist writings concerning Russia and Polish-Russian relations. Russia's nationhood and its role are clearly expressed in two Towianist documents: Alexander Chodźko's 1844 letter to Tsar Nicholas I, and Karol Różycki's *Powody* (Reasons) addressed to Tsar Alexander II in 1857.

48
[Towiański], *Banquet*, 7.

Chodźko's letter was one of the first Towianist appeals to a monarch. The letter's publication caused wrath and discomfort within the Polish emigration and the Paris Circle. It expresses the Towianist concept of Israel-Slav to the tsar and how to concretely accomplish the duty of a Minister-Nation.

> "Russia preserved, until this century, the primitive simplicity of its soul. The thought of God resides on it [. . .] The foundation of the Slavic soul preserved its purity until today. While the spark of Jesus Christ became obscured on earth, within the Slavs it is possible to find it again. [. . .] The banner of Jesus Christ is granted to the Slavic race, the massive core of the army of God. In due course, this banner, held by the people minister of the Word, must wave on the entire word."[49]

This letter is a call to the unity of the Slavic people, who must act together to revive the spark of Jesus Christ within them and accomplish the divine call of the Cause of God.

> "The Word, which becomes listened to again, is calling the Slavic people to its duty. All the branches of the Slavic tree must be aligned and developed according to the primitive thought of God. [. . .] The time has come. In order to accomplish the goal that God determined for them [the Slavic nations], everyone, united in love, as it was never conceived and practiced before, must merge their efforts towards a great and common interest."[50]

In his letter, Chodźko identifies the tsar as the person capable of aligning the branches of the Slavic tree and of guiding the Slavic nations towards the accomplishment of their duty:

> "Sire, your soul is great. [. . .] Sire, the health of millions is assigned to you. Nowadays, leading the Slavic people subjected to your sceptre, you are the greater instrument of God on earth. Sire, if you obey the call of God, your subjects faithful to God will be devoted to the thought of God deposited into you."[51]

Chodźko's letter is not merely a form of submission to the tsar. He underlines the primacy of spiritual authority over earthly power, and the primacy of God over politics. Chodźko calls on Nicholas I to become an instrument of God. Yet, to do so, the tsar must accept God's call, the Cause of God, whereby the tsar could use his sceptre to subjugate and lead Slavic people, but only if he submitted to Towiański and his mission.

Różycki's *Powody* was published in reply to the amnesty announced after Tsar Alexander II was crowned. Numerous Towianists fought in the November Uprising and, like their compatriots in Paris, they could not accept the Russian amnesty. The Towianist motivations were not purely political, Różycki points out: "In our actual position, we cannot take advantage of this pardon. We have the permission of the government, but we do not have the permission of God. Until now, we have not accomplished the duty that God assigned us."[52] Różycki uses Towiański's words to illustrate the reasons that supported the rejection of amnesty. These reasons are related to the Towianist concept of metempsychosis applied to a national level. The Towianists could not accept amnesty because the exile was a

49
[Towiański], "Écrit adressé par Alexandre Chodźko," in *Kilka aktów i dokumentów odnoszących się do działalności Andrzeja Towiańskiego* [Several Acts and Documents Concerning the Activities of Andrzej Towiański] (Rome: Forzani i Sp., 1898), 1:34.

50
[Towiański], "Écrit adressé par Alexandre Chodźko," 35.

51
[Towiański], "Écrit adressé par Alexandre Chodźko," 38.

52
[Karol Różycki], *Powody dla których amnestya przyjętą być nie może. Przedstawione przez część emigracyi polskiéj Jego Cesarskiéj Mości Alexandrowi II* [Reasons Why the Amnesty Cannot Be Accepted. Presented by Part of the Polish Emigration to His Imperial Majesty Alexander II] (Paris: L. Martinet, 1857), 6.

means of expiation for the past sins of Poland. According to Różycki, during the Golden Liberty, Poles abused the love of God, and they did not live according to the Triple Sacrifice. Therefore, God punished them through exile and a foreign yoke. That is why "[Poland] suffers more than other nations. It rejected its main duty: to fulfil the role assigned in elevating and extending Christianity on earth."[53] Nevertheless, according to the Towianist perspective, exile is merely the condition for manifesting contrition. Sin can be expiated:

> "Only through external action [the sacrifice of action], submission to force, servile obedience, [. . .] conciliating the duties towards God with the duties towards Authority. [. . .] Sire, this is the main truth on which we base our submission and our loyalty to You. This is the source from which our love, our sacrifice, and all our feelings for the Russian nation and its government spring."[54]

For Różycki, to accept the amnesty would also be to condemn the Russian nation, because the decision went against God's Will. Różycki does not mention a specific role for Russia, but he always stresses the necessity for the Polish nation to love its neighbour. While Różycki speaks of Poland, he speaks of Russia, too. His words were a warning to Russia. Just as Poland lost its freedom because it did not fulfil the Triple Sacrifice, Russia could lose its freedom if it continued to pursue un-Christian actions.

In 1863, the same stances taken in Chodźko's letter and *Powody* were expressed in Różycki's *Do ródakow* (To my Compatriots). The book is a collection of Towiański's writings addressed to Poles who took part in the January Uprising:

> "God has opened to both nations a merrier future. In this future, the following direction was presented for them: You, Poland, accept true Christianity, and, through Christian force, recover the fatherland. You, Russia, come out of the darkness, arise pure and take your higher destiny. And you, Russian government, recognise the truth, the justice of God, and fulfil this truth, this justice towards the peoples subjected to your leadership!"[55]

Różycki's *Do rodaków* was published in Paris so it could circulate among the Polish emigration. Towiański also wrote a letter to Alexander II directly. As Chodźko did in 1844, Towiański expressed the Cause of God to the tsar, explicitly writing that through it, "[You could] find aid in order to lead the people subjected to Your will towards the destined well-being."[56] But the tsar never replied to the Towianist appeals.

3.2. The Italian Question

A member of the Giovine Italia, Giovanni Battista Scovazzi (1808–1893), brought Towiański's message to Italy. Towiański appointed him "to take up the cross of Jesus Christ and bring it to Italy."[57] Starting from 1848, Scovazzi gathered a few disciples and established a Towianist Circle in Turin. In Towiański's first manuscripts and speeches, Italy is not mentioned. The only references to the Italian nation can be found in posthumous Towianist publications. Scovazzi gave the first definition of the mission of the Italian nation in 1848:

53 [Różycki], *Powody*, 9.

54 [Różycki], *Powody*, 11–12.

55 [Karol Różycki], *Do rodaków tułacz kończący tułactwo* [To My Compatriots. A Wanderer at the End of His Wandering] (Paris: E. Martinet, 1863), 16.

56 [Towiański], "Écrit adressé a S.M. l'Empereur Alexandre II," in *Pisma*, 3:209.

57 Tancredi Canonico, *Testimonianze di italiani su Andrea Towiański* [Testimonies of Italians on Andrzej Towiański] (Rome: Forzani e C. Tipografi del Senato, 1903), 29.

> "Italy has the duty to resolve the religious question, the heart of the matter of human life. Italy is still materially weak, it must manifest on earth the power of the spirit, the power of heaven. The thought of God is upon Italy, and I believe that the Italians will fulfil it. They will continue the Christian apostleship that made Rome the centre of Christianity, the centre and unity of the Church, and the leader of the Christian movement in the world."[58]

Unlike the other Minister-Nations, Italy did not have any defined historical or political identity. Therefore, the concept of the Italian nation was interlinked with its political emancipation. Since the Italian Towianist Circle was formed by subjects of the Kingdom of Sardinia, the identity of Italy and the Italian nation was defined according to the Piedmontese political perspective. Indeed, after the Congress of Vienna, the Kingdom of Sardinia was the only Italian State able to pursue a foreign policy of territorial expansion. In the second half of the nineteenth century, it progressively occupied the Italian peninsula through military conflicts against the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1848, 1859, and 1866; the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1860; and the State of the Church in 1870.

The most significant Towianist document concerning Italy is the transcription of a meeting held in October 1860. At the time, Italy did not yet exist as a nation-State. However, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies soon capitulated under the invasion of the Sardinian army. A great political transformation of the Italian peninsula was perceived to be underway. Towiański addressed these words to his disciples:

> "The Italians are among the higher nations, called to give the world an example of the true, living, Christianity practiced in every aspect of life. Moreover, according to the signs manifested by God in these last times, it is destined to be the first to manifest Christianity in public life, through the great action of its political regeneration."[59]

According to Towiański, Italy's specific role, revealed by God, was to enlighten the path for other nations and to save the Church from its degeneration:

> "Every Italian has the duty to awake in himself the love for the true and living Church. [. . .] He has the duty to awake in himself the Christian disgust towards the false movement of the soul, which the Pharisees of our time hide under the forms of Jesus Christ and of his Church. [. . .] According to God's call, the Church will be purified from the men that introduced the false.[60]

In 1866, a public lecture given by the leader of the Turin Circle, Tancredi Canonico (1828–1908), professor of law at the University of Turin, expressed Italy's status in the Higher Christian Epoch. The Kingdom of Italy had been proclaimed five years before but lacked the Venetian provinces and Papal territories. According to Canonico, this incomplete Italy was perceived as God's Will. The Italians were not ready to benefit from the nation's political creation because their spirit was not aligned with Jesus Christ. Already in 1849, Scovazzi prayed during the first Sardinian war against Austria: "If, in order to prepare Italy for its providential mission in the world, it is necessary to be humiliated through a defeat; I will submissively accept this trial as long as my fatherland,

58
Canonico, *Testimonianze*, 40.

59
[Towiański], "Extraits d'un entretien avec quelques frères italiens," in *Pisma*, 3:249.

60
[Towiański], "Extraits d'un entretien avec quelques frères italiens," 252.

through this means, would get closer to the mission predestined by God's Will."[61] Canonico identifies the Papal withdrawal from the Sardinian-Austrian war as a missed chance to fulfil the Italian mission: "I believed that the time when Gospel and politics would not have been two separated and different worlds has come. One would have to compenetrate the other. Fatherland and Christianity, unified in the same higher flame, will shine of a more ardent and refulgent light."[62] In Canonico's lecture, it is clear that Italy, more than any other nation, was duty-bound to deal with the Church and its temporal power, in view of spiritually renewing it.

> "God does not want a sanctimonious and ingenious Italy. However, He will never permit a sceptical and materialist Italy. The true Church is inseparable from our true national life. If it is crystallised in doctrine and forms, it provokes indignation and pain. If it will revive and live in our hearts, it will be the inexhaustible source of true Italian greatness."[63]

Furthermore, Canonico states that Italy has a role, linking its destiny to its national metempsychosis.

> "There is justice for the people's guilt as there is one for the individuals. Italy suffered centuries of misfortune and serfdom due to the slavery and the pain imposed by the Roman domination on the world. [. . .] We must find the force to elevate ourselves to the place that God destined us: to be the vanguard of nations."[64]

A few years later, Towiański also stressed the role of Italy. He wrote to King Victor Emmanuel II during the Kingdom of Italy's formal annexation of the Papal territories. Towiański simply warned the king: "The Roman question is presented in front of His Majesty as an inevitable field of action on which Italy must produce the fruits of its Christian vocation, the fruits of its active loyalty to the true Church of Jesus Christ."[65]

According to the words of Towiański and his Italian disciples, we can see that the pivot of the entire Italian nation did not concern Italy itself but had a more European, universalistic dimension. Although Italy was not labelled as a Minister-Nation, it had the role of leading the Minister-Nations to the concrete realisation of the Higher Christian Epoch. Moreover, the most important duty of the Italian nation was solving the Roman question. Italy was perceived as the only country that could deal with the Papacy and the only one that could re-establish the Church of Jesus Christ over the Roman Catholic Church, corrupted by the Spirit of the Earth.

4. Conclusions: Soteriology of the Nation

In Towiański's thought, nationalism and religion are deeply intertwined from a Catholic esoteric perspective.

The highly spiritualistic nature of Towiański's doctrine is the same as that of Pietism, Jansenism, and other heterodox doctrines that, according to Carlton J. H. Hayes, ensured a spiritual basis for the development of nationalism through the predestination of man and nations.[66] Indeed, Towiański's first Italian opponents accused his doctrine of renewing the ideas of Pietism, Jansenism, and Quietism,[67] which a few decades before had started to recirculate on the Italian peninsula.[68]

61
Canonico, *Testimonianze*, 103.

62
Tancredi Canonico, *I tempi attuali e la missione di Andrea Towiański* [The Present Time and the Mission of Andrzej Towiański] (Turin: Stamperia dell'unione tipografico-editrice, 1866), 10.

63
Canonico, *I tempi attuali*, 30.

64
Canonico, *I tempi attuali*, 31.

65
[Towiański], "Écrit addressé à S.M. le Roi Victor-Emanuel II," in *Pisma*, 3:288.

66
Carlton J. H. Hayes, *Nationalism: A Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), 46–48.

67
"Andrea Towianski, nuovo inviato di Dio," [Andrzej Towiański. The New Envoy of God] *L'Armonia* 7, no. 140 (21/11/1854). "Propagazione di una nuova setta in Torino" [Diffusion of a New Sect in Turin], *L'Armonia* 8, no. 267 (22/11/1855).

68
Cf. Pietro Stella, *Il giansenismo in Italia*, [Jansenism in Italy] 3 vols., (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2006–2007). Ettore Rota, "Il giansenismo in Lombardia ed i prodromi del risorgimento italiano" [Jansenism in Lombardy and the Prelude of Italian Risorgimento], in *Raccolta di scritti storici in onore del prof. Giacinto Romano nel suo XXV anno di insegnamento* [Collection of Historical Writings in Honour of prof. Giacinto Romano in His 25th Year of Professorship] (Pavia: Successori Fusi, 1907), 363–626.

The esoteric traits of Towiański's religious doctrine produced a form of political thought with a strong Messianic approach. Although Towiański's preaching shared the goal proclaimed by the various European liberal-national movements, the religious basis of his doctrine was substantially different in the *praxis* required to achieve a nation's political recognition and renewal. Nevertheless, political powers, and their revolutionary nemesis, reacted dichotomously to Towiański's teachings. Towiański was aware of the reluctance to accept his message, but on numerous occasions, he and his disciples wrote to various political and cultural personalities trying to persuade them to help save humanity through the acceptance of the Cause of God. This behaviour can be explained through Jacob L. Talmon's words about the messianic approach to history: "Leaders are not prompted by ambition and grope for purposes. They are instruments of destiny. Victory or defeat become verdicts of History: the assertion of a higher right or the proof of exhaustion."[69] However, due to the living nature of nations, Towiański conceived of leaders as both individuals and nations.

69
Jacob L. Talmon, *Political Messianism. The Romantic Phase* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1960), 25.

4.1 Subversion of Progressivist Nationalism

In the material presented, we can see a variation, a progression in Towiański's conception of the nations involved in the fulfilment of the Higher Christian Epoch. Initially, Towiański focused his preaching on the Polish nation and on France, represented by Napoleon. In *Wielki Period*, he tried to systematise a triple scheme with the insertion of the Jewish nation. Moreover, he called upon the Russian nation in the same period. Towiański thus focused more of his thought on Italy.

What can be perceived as incoherent and contradictory could be explained by the progressive nature of revelation. For Towiański, progress, as perceived by numerous Romantic thinkers, relies on a series of revelations disclosed by God in every epoch. This concept was well explained by Mickiewicz in his Towianist lectures. According to him, Christianity makes it possible to "receive successive revelations, that must complete Christianity itself. [. . .] Humanity has never progressed in any other way. It will never advance except by a series of revelations."[70] Therefore, Towiański's preaching to different nations could be understood as his willingness to successively disclose the revelation he allegedly received in Wilno in separate historical moments. Nevertheless, since the Towianists stressed to the Minister-Nations the need to pursue their missions during periods of political tension, this explanation can also be interpreted as Towiański's need to adapt his preaching to the various political scenarios and their evolution. That said, according to a Towianist manuscript, and contrary to the Towianist publications depicting Towiański as interested in the Italian nation from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, Towiański had already identified Italy as a Minister-Nation (excluding the Jewish and the Russian nations) in 1844. This manuscript maintains that, when Towiański met Scovazzi for the first time, he stated, "Italy, Poland, and France [. . .] These are the people leaders. These are the first called."[71]

The linear progression according to the revelations presents three intertwined features that clash with the mainstream Romantic progressivist conception of history and humanity: the Millenarian perspective, metempsychosis, and the Minister-Nations.

The Millenarian perspective abolishes the *repetitio ad infinitum* of history.[72] Messianism thus undermines the illusion of eternal progress

70
Adam Mickiewicz, *L'Église officielle et le messianisme* (Paris: Imprimeurs-Unis, 1845), 9.

71
THEO.16, *1844. Prime parole del Servo di Dio al f.llo Scovazzi*, [The First Words of the Servant of God to Brother Scovazzi] Fondo Towiansky, Biblioteca Erik Peterson, Turin, Italy.

72
Mircea Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour. Archétypes et répétition* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 159.

sprung from the Enlightenment, supported by the national revolutionary movements, and perpetuated by positivism. Towiański's concept of metempsychosis shares the same perspective, focused on progress through perpetual spiritual perfectionism. The columns of light and darkness permit the soul and nations to either improve or decompensate. In this way, progress, both for the individual and for nations, is not assured by Towiański's doctrine. Earthly progress can only be attained through the exercise of Jesus Christ's law, but the refusal of Christian principles will surely arrest progress and push humanity backward. Finally, the conception of Minister-Nations directly attacks the conception of progressivist egalitarian-democracy in favour of a spiritual aristocracy. In Towiański's thought, only selected nations have the duty, and the capacity, to participate in leading other nations and humanity into the Higher Christian Epoch. Towiański clearly stated, "All three branches of Israel live in a new tone. They govern and they occupy a social place according to their kind of spirit. The Minister-Nations raise as the columns of God's Word."[73] As a result, Towiański first distinguishes between nations that lead and nations that cannot intervene on their own in the process of achieving progress. Secondly, although nominally equal, Minister-Nations are formally ordered by a spiritual hierarchy according to their duty and their potential. Towiański's thought bears witness to the breakdown of the Romantic concept that every nation participates, according to its *geist*, in achieving the intra-historical goal of progress through its own mission. Only certain nations preserve the Christian qualities to guide others, while the majority of nations are still waiting to be enlightened because they abandoned or never truly accepted God's Word.

The chosenness of Minister-Nations and their divine mandate to lead other nations towards progress is reflected in the Higher Spirits, which Słowacki called "King-Spirits." According to Towiański's doctrine, the column of light can create new Higher Spirits through turning man's soul towards the Good. Each nation produces personalities greater than others who, through their spirit, inspire and lead the nation toward higher virtues. These King-Spirits often appear in the Towianist exoteric writings, and they are subjected to sacralisation. In the European nineteenth century, the King-Spirits were clearly identified by Towiański as people of action: "The Frenchmen have their ideal in Napoleon I. The Poles have it in Kościuszko. Nowadays, the Italians have it in Garibaldi."[74] In Towiański's thought, the equality of individuals succumbs by dint of a heroic attitude, producing what Anthony Smith called, concerning the sacralisation of national heroes, an "elite nationalism [. . .] focused primarily on representations of the virtuous actions of charismatic individuals and groups, both past and present."[75] The Towianist journals[76] include lists of these "charismatic individuals," such as personalities in the political, cultural, and religious spheres, like Julius Caesar, Sigismund I the Old, Washington, Luther, Zwingli, Goethe, Bach, and Beethoven.

Again, the progression stressed by the Triple Sacrifice helps to understand this spiritual hierarchy. In Towiański's thought, we notice a triple scheme: there are the three Sacrifices, which aim to prepare the individual in three fields of life, and the three Israels, which have three duties to progressively accomplish to fully implement the Higher Christian Epoch. Through this scheme, three couples can be obtained: Israel-Jew / Sacrifice of Spirit, Israel-French / Sacrifice of Body, and Israel-Slav / Sacrifice of Action. Since the Triple Sacrifice needs the sequential accomplishment of

73
Towiański, "Wielki Period," 113.

74
[Towiański], "Extraits d'un entretien avec Tancrède C.," in *Pisma*, 3:257.

75
Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen People. Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 223.

76
Kalendarz [Journal] in 95/55, 96/55, 97/55, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, Krakow, Poland.

every sacrifice to attain individual perfection, the duties of the three Minister-Nations must be attained in the right order, according to their hierarchy of the spirit, to receive the benefits of the Higher Christian Epoch.

4.2 Nations as Messiah

The progressive conception of history denotes that the main ideal promoted by Towiański's doctrine is a striving for a progressive, and perpetual, spiritual perfectionism. Nonetheless, for Towiański, the only possible perfection could be achieved through exercising the law of Jesus Christ on earth. Nevertheless, the mere application of the teachings of Jesus Christ would not directly re-establish the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, nor any other nation-State. The nation, which was a living creature created by God, would only be politically realised, and consecrated by God, through the total submission of the people to God's Will. Thus, God's Will was to be manifested only through meeting two criteria: the Pauline earthly acceptance of the current political situation and the heaven-inspired willingness to pursue human progress through the concrete application of the law of Jesus Christ. Meeting these two apparently contradicting criteria transmutes the nation into a Christian nation.

The Towianist concept of a Christian nation identifies the political manifestation of the establishment or renewal of the nation-State as the fulfilment of God's Will, thereby attaining a state similar to the Kingdom of God on earth. Differing from numerous Romantic thinkers who strove for the earthly establishment of the Kingdom of God, the Higher Christian Epoch preached by Towiański was an earthly state necessary to attain, after death, the heavenly Kingdom of God in heaven. For the Towianists, the Christian nation was the preliminary step of earthly redemption prior to heavenly salvation.

Although the Towianist preaching involved the resurrection of Poland and concrete actions around Italian unity, Towiański's messianism is not resolved in the mere political recognition of the nation as a nation-State. Towiański's Minister-Nations have a more profound religious significance that collides with their political outcomes. Israel-Jew is identified in the Jewish nation as the depository of the Covenant, and not as a political entity with geographical borders. Israel-French does not correspond to the already existing French nation but to an anointed political actor operating for the concrete implementation of the Second Covenant. As for Israel-Slav, it is vaguely identified with the Slavic people. In Towiański's speeches, Poland preserved the spark of Jesus Christ to a higher degree of purity than any other nation. Nonetheless, Russia was the nation that, once it broke the yoke of the Spirit of the Earth, should lead the Slavic nations toward Christian progress. Finally, Italy resides outside the Towianist triple scheme. The Romantic irredentist movements in Italy and Poland are often compared since they are both nations without a State. Nonetheless, the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania had a centenary history that helped identify what was part of the nation and what was not.[77] By contrast, Italy never existed as a political entity.[78] This meant that the Italian nation represented the establishment of the nation-State through the conquest of the Italian territories by the Kingdom of Sardinia, congruent with its religious mission culminating in the occupation of the State of the Church. This mission was devoted to the *renovatio* of the Church-Institution of the Pope-Kings to promote the Church-Living Body of Jesus Christ; the latter was identified as the earthly implementation of Towiański's Cause of God.

77
Serhiy Bilenky, "Reconsidering Nationality: Poland," in *Romantic Nationalism in Eastern Europe. Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian Political Imaginations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 103–81.

78
Cf. Duccio Balestracci, *Medioevo e Risorgimento. L'invenzione dell'identità italiana nell'Ottocento* [Middle Age and Risorgimento. The Invention of Italian Identity in the Nineteenth Century] (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2015). Angela De Benedictis, Irene Fosi, and Luca Mannori, eds., *Nazioni d'Italia. Identità politiche e appartenenze regionali fra Settecento e Ottocento* [Nations of Italy. Political Identities and Regional Affiliation between the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth Centuries] (Roma: Viella, 2012).

Photograph © G.D.G. Biblioteca Reale di Torino, Archivio Begey, 30. "Andrea Fossombrone da Zara," 8. This drawing was made by the Towianist painter Andrea Fossombrone during or a few years after the Great War. The Great War was particularly considered by the Towianists since it was perceived as an occurence that could finally unify the territories identified as part of the Italian nation and freed the Polish nation from foreign yokes.

Towiański's doctrine perceived the Minister-Nations, Italy included, as a collective *Ha-Mashiach* that pursued the needs of justice, liberation, and renewal typical of every historical age.[79] Therefore, three perspectives of the nation can be identified in Towiański's thought: 1) the nation according to the Romantic concept of a living entity created by God; 2) the nation as an institutional and geopolitical nation-State; and 3) the nation as a Christian nation, a political actor that operates according to the law of Jesus Christ. Thus, nations present two predominantly religious characteristics. First, *transcendence*: nations live and develop through time and space, moving beyond States' political borders and shaping reality through their will, becoming a bridge between God and individuals. Second, *renewal*: nations, politically recognised or not, must accept God's Will and practice the law of Jesus Christ, overcoming their earthly desires to regenerate themselves through the Higher Christian Epoch. The palingenetic Romantic idea promoted by Towiański is different from the other Romantic nationalistic conception which, in the following century, would partially degenerate into totalitarian nationalistic manifestations.[80] Towiański's idea is purely religious and based on an actual belief in metempsychosis and in the

79
Emmanuel Lévinas, "Commentaires. Textes messianiques," in *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1963), 95–149.

80
Blandine Kriegel, "Romanticism and Totalitarianism," in *The State and the Rule of Law*, trans. by Marc A. LePain and Jeffrey C. Cohen, foreword by Donald R. Kelley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 99–105. Alberto Mario Banti, *Sublime madre nostra. La nazione italiana dal Risorgimento al fascismo* [Our Magnificent Mother. The Italian Nation from Risorgimento to Fascism] (Roma: Laterza, 2014), VI–IX.

progressive improvement of the spirit of individuals through their successive lives.

In conclusion, Towiański's concept of nation embodied the soteriological aspect belonging to Millenarianism. Nations do not have to be politically constructed because they are already created by God. According to Towiański, the political recognition of nations is useless if they do not follow the path traced by Jesus Christ. Nations and nation-States must be infused with new Christian life and develop their political and social life according to God's Will. This process, which implies the passive acceptance of God's Will, the revolutionary exercise of the law of Jesus Christ, and the total acceptance and implementation of the Cause of God, is the only way nations without States and States without nations can be born. Through the Triple Sacrifice and the perpetual perfectionism of metempsychosis, Towiański aimed for a total Christianisation of the individual, society, nation, and international relations.

Nation and Commemoration: Cultural Saints and National Pantheons

Marijan Dović

Centro Studi
di Civiltà e Spiritualità
Comparate
fondazione
Giorgio Cini onlus

Marijan Dović
ZRC SAZU Institute of Slovenian Literature and Literary Studies
marijan.dovic@zrc-sazu.si

Keywords:
Cultural Sainthood, Pantheons, Canonization, Pantheonization, Nationalism and religion, European Nation-states

To cite this:
Dović, Marijan. "Nation and Commemoration: Cultural Saints and National Pantheons." *Religiographies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2023): 58–75.

Abstract

In the course of the nineteenth century, literary cultures throughout Europe began to enthusiastically venerate their (deceased) artists and intellectuals as their exemplary representatives. Through the process of canonization, these artists became "cultural saints," acquiring a social status and symbolic significance traditionally reserved for royal authorities and religious saints. As increasing research into the commemorative culture of the nineteenth century reveals, there are numerous analogies between the veneration of religious saints and the inauguration of their cultural counterparts. Especially after the 1830s, cults of cultural saints spread rapidly across the continent. Cultural saints also played an important role in the newly created "national pantheons" that usually took the physical form of (secularized) pantheon churches, pantheon cemeteries, galleries of sculptures or paintings, and so on, in which the emerging national cultures "exhibited" their great personalities. As a brief overview of the various European solutions demonstrates, the "pantheonic imagination" went in very different directions. It also indicates that a broad comparative study of national pantheons, taking into account both larger and smaller nations, would be of great benefit to various disciplines, including history, memory studies, nationalism studies, and religious studies.

This article considers the specific relationship between nation and commemoration manifested in two closely related phenomena: the veneration of cultural saints and the emergence of national pantheons. Both have a considerable prehistory: the tendency to preserve the memory of the deceased cultural greats of a community through rituals and the tendency to honor all the key figures of that community, preferably in a prestigious place, span a vast historical trajectory since the beginning of human civilization. Both phenomena have also always encompassed a religious dimension. From the deceased Greek poets, whose tombs were showered with offerings, to the modern literary figures canonized by the Orthodox Churches, the commemoration of artistic and cultural "greats" has regularly had a sacred character. As with the pantheons, religious connotations are deeply woven into the concept, which has undergone numerous transformations throughout its history, and the same is true for the design of most of the buildings in which pantheons have concretized.

I address the two phenomena—in the broadest sense, they can be understood as practices of commemoration—in a specific context, the context of the nation. I therefore consider the emergence of cultural saints, which appeared alongside religious saints but also rulers and military leaders, especially in the nineteenth century, and the emergence of national pantheons, which appeared in very different materializations across the continent at the same time, in close connection with the history of (European) nationalism. The historically specific trait of national thought that spread in Europe from the end of the eighteenth century changed the (self-)understanding of human society: it increasingly became a community of nations that could be clearly distinguished from each other on the basis of their unique culture. Of course, I do not want to reproduce

here the history of the phenomenon that underpins the everyday identity experience of most people in the world today. However, I can point out that since Carlton Hayes' pioneering essays many important scholars have interpreted nationalism as a form of secular or civil (or civic) religion—and the following consideration of cultural saints and national pantheons is certainly based on this tradition.[1]

Research on "cultural saints" is quite recent and mainly comes from the last decade and a half.[2] It is based on studies of commemorative culture, which have documented an astonishing Europe-wide spread of nationally motivated veneration of the "great men" of culture: poets, writers, composers, and other artists and intellectuals. The massive dimensions of cults rhythmicized by jubilees in the nineteenth century, especially the "centenary cult," the exalted erection of monuments (*Denkmalwut*), and the manifold rituals bear witness to the important role that the celebration of artists played in the formation of modern European nations.[3] This practice was even more important for smaller, politically subordinate cultures with less pronounced historical or political identities, where the investment in language and literature was even more emphatic and the prominent position often belonged posthumously to poets declared "national."[4] At first glance, it seems surprising that the rhetoric and practices of national movements contained religious elements: not only in Catholic and Orthodox areas of Europe, but also in Protestant regions, artists' commemorative cults took on the characteristics of traditional saintly cults, such as the *translatio* of relics, various rituals tied to specific "saints' days," pilgrimages, sacralized memorials, hagiographic representations, and so on. Numerous examples confirm that the "saintly" metaphor is extremely useful for the analysis of such phenomena—especially in the context of understanding nationalism as a civil religion.

Similarly, important research on "national pantheons" has also appeared in recent decades. In particular, the four most notable European examples discussed in the book by Eveline G. Bouwers—the pantheons in Rome, Paris, London, and Regensburg—were the subject of thorough analyses that included comparative aspects.[5] Much as with the cults of cultural saints that were utilizing similar patterns in very distant places, structural similarities, inspiration, and even direct imitation were also at play in the design of the pantheons. However, the fact that all nations, even the smaller ones, wanted to have pantheons in one form or another—even if the idea took very different forms and the implementation was far from optimal—has received less attention so far. Although there are numerous studies on this European network of pantheons (often only in the respective national languages), dealing with their various aspects (architectural, political, and art historical), we are still far from a synthesis in this respect. Therefore, I also reflect on how this research could be added to. I consider this particularly valuable because both phenomena—cultural saints and national pantheons—are important for the study of cultural and political nationalism and, not least of all, for the formation of a "Europe of nations." Moreover, I suggest that the metaphor of cultural saints can inspire conceptualization of the metaphor of national pantheons.

1
Among these, for example, Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1960); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006).

2
Cf. Marijan Dović and Jón Karl Helgason, *National Poets, Cultural Saints: Canonization and Commemorative Cults of Writers in Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); and Marijan Dović and Jón Karl Helgason, eds., *Great Immortality: Studies on European Cultural Sainthood* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

3
A reference publication in this field is Joep Leerssen and Ann Rigney, eds., *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Nation-Building and Centenary Fever* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). It includes analyses of major commemorations across the continent from the mid-nineteenth century to World War I.

4
Cf. the thematic section "Figures of National Poets" in the fourth volume of Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, eds., *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2010).

5
Cf. Eveline G. Bouwers, *Public Pantheons in Revolutionary Europe: Comparing Cultures of Remembrance, c. 1790–1840* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and Richard Wrigley and Matthew Craske, eds., *Pantheons: Transformations of a Monumental Idea* (London: Routledge, 2004).

I. Cultural Saints and Their Canonization

The transference of the idea of sainthood to the realm of secular culture is not in itself new; it occurred as early as 1841 in Thomas Carlyle's famous lectures on hero worship.[6] In other respects, the transference of religious practices or concepts such as worship, ritual, idolatry, relics, cult, or charisma into the sphere of secular culture has been frequently observed (and occasionally criticized) by contemporaries of artistic cults in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The *liaisons dangereuses* between religion and (secular) artistic cults of fame were also observed (and occasionally criticized) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By contrast, the term itself appeared only recently; with some hesitancy, for example, in connection with the immortals of cultural history, but more explicitly in connection with celebrity worship in mass media culture (e.g., Elvis Presley and Madonna).[7] The metaphor of cultural sainthood undoubtedly fits well with the icons of popular culture, but it fits even better with the heroes promoted and venerated in the context of national movements, especially from the 1830s onward. As explained in the book I co-authored with Jón Karl Helgason, the term *cultural saints* refers to deceased poets, writers, and other artists and intellectuals who, as embodiments of certain social ideals, became figures in the cultural memory of their national (or regional) cultures, and assumed social roles traditionally reserved for rulers and saints.[8]

How this process took place can be explained with the help of the concept of *canonization*. In the humanities, the terms *canon* and *canonization* usually refer to a selected elite corpus of artworks (e.g., the literary, visual, and musical canon), and sometimes to the artists themselves and/or the process of their establishment (canonized or canonical authors). From our point of view, however, it has proven useful to broaden such a traditional understanding to include not only textual practices (such as critical edition, revision, interpretation, or appropriation), but also ritual practices (commemorations, festivals, processions, and handling of relics), and mnemonic practices (setting up a constellation of *lieux de mémoire*, and naming places and institutions). In our book, the possibilities of such an extension were presented in the condensed form of an analytical model of canonization, and so I will not go into detail here. I would only like to emphasize that the aforementioned model focuses not only on the life and work of cultural saints, but also on those that cultivate their memory—by analogy with canonization in Catholicism, one could call them *postulators*.[9]

So, who were the chosen ones elevated to the prestigious status of cultural saints? As the term itself implies, the potential candidates were by no means only poets. Many European artists can be understood as cultural saints—among them, above all, musicians, painters, sculptors, and architects, and here and there a philologist or linguist (e.g., Elias Lönnrot, the author of the Finnish *Kalevala*, or Ferenc Kazinczy, the "purifier" of the Hungarian language). However, in accordance with the prominent position that language practice occupied in the context of cultural nationalism, the most lively cults developed in relation to writers and, in particular, poets. In the new, national context, the veneration of older literary giants (Petrarch, Shakespeare, Camões, and Cervantes) was revived, and the veneration of younger poets (Schiller, Burns, Mickiewicz, Petőfi, Prešeren, Hallgrímsson, Mácha, Shevchenko, etc.) also flourished. It is therefore not at all surprising that the *national poet* can be understood as a paradigmatic embodiment of a cultural saint. This is a structural position legitimized by the pan-European discourse of Romanticism and gratefully

6
Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (London: James Fraser, 1841). The Scottish philosopher talks about hero-worship, about poets as saints, and about their canonization in the third chapter, entitled "The Hero as Poet." He refers to Dante and Shakespeare as "saints of poetry" that have definitely been "canonised, though no Pope or Cardinals took hand in doing it" (138).

7
On other uses, cf. the Introduction in Dović and Helgason, *National Poets*.

8
Dović and Helgason, *National Poets*, 3.

9
Regarding the model, cf. Dović and Helgason, *National Poets*, 94–95; on postulators: 32–34.

accepted especially by the (semi)peripheral literary cultures.[10]

The veneration of cultural saints took its most fascinating forms between 1840 and 1940.[11] At that time, the cults gripped the whole of Europe like a kind of epidemic and also reached beyond its borders (e.g., to the Caucasian countries, the US, and later Israel). Smaller literary cultures celebrated mostly romantic (poetic) giants, and the dominant cultures dragged established authorities of their respective artistic canons into the maelstrom of increasingly nationalist cults. The euphoria peaked at the beginning of the twentieth century and only slowly ebbed after World War I. By then, commemorative cults had mostly moved away from extreme and large-scale forms, but the inertia of cultural nationalism often kept cultural saints on the surface, albeit in the somewhat ossified form of "canonical giants." In most cases, these have remained central national icons to this day and a convenient source for ever-new appropriations. What is more, especially in recent decades, some cases return in surprising post-secular transformations in which the dividing line between cultural and ecclesiastical canonization disappears.[12]

10
Cf. Virgil Nemoianu, "'National Poets' in the Romantic Age: Emergence and Importance," in *Romantic Poetry*, ed. Angela Esterhammer (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002), 249–55; and Marko Juvan, "Romanticism and National Poets on the Margins of Europe: Prešeren and Hallgrímsson," in *Literary Dislocations*, ed. Sonja Stojmenska-Elzeser and Vladimir Martinovski (Skopje: Institute of Macedonian literature, 2012), 592–600.

11
This finding is based on empirical data and attempts to partially correct the general view that the long nineteenth century as a whole can be characterized as a "commemorative century" (cf. Dović and Helgason, *National Poets*, 51–53).

12
Cf. chapters on Ilia Chavchavadze, Mihai Eminescu, Petar II Petrović Njegoš, and Antoni Gaudí in *Great Immortality*.

From the Culture of Saints to the Saints of Culture

Now, to take up Jernej Habjan's imaginative chiasm, how did we get from the culture of saints to the saints of culture?[13] The development indicated above certainly encourages us to look for analogies between the veneration of saints (or, more generally, of holy persons) in different religious traditions and the emergence of their cultural counterparts. In the case of Christian saint cults in particular, it is relatively easy to draw several parallels that are evident both in the organization of the cults and in the process of canonization. Whereas the cults of Christian saints covered medieval Europe with a multitude of shrines, the cults of cultural saints covered modern Europe with a multitude of monuments, memorials, museums, and institutions.[14] Both types of cults contributed significantly to the organization of social space and time and influenced the daily life of the community through various rituals. Relics also played an important role in this transformation—which may seem surprising in the case of secular cults. Finally, the paths to full official recognition are also partly analogous, although the canonization of cultural saints does not have such formalized procedures as those developed, for example, for the beatification and canonization of saints in the Catholic Church.

13
Jernej Habjan, "From the Culture of Saints to the Saints of Culture: The Saint and the Writer between Life and Work," in *Great Immortality*, 331–42.

14
On saintly cults, cf. Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). On writers' houses, cf. Harald Hendrix, ed., *Writers' Houses and the Making of Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

15
In older times, the relationships may be even more complicated. In Greek heroic cults, poets were worshipped as demigods (e.g., Homer, Hesiod, and Archilochus); the ancient Egyptians deified the great scholar and poet Imhotep; and the cult of the medieval poet Hafiz in Persian culture retains a distinctly religious character to this day. The expansion of research to non-European cultures is certainly a challenge for the future.

Despite these similarities, cultural saints are not simply a mirror image of religious saints.[15] At least one difference prevents carrying the metaphor through to the end. Belief in an afterlife is constitutive only of religious cults, not secular ones. An ecclesiastical saint may be physically dead in this world, but as a member of the heavenly communion of saints he or she lives on and can act as an intercessor with God. For the believer, a saint represents a shortcut to direct communication with the Creator, who is the only true source of sacred power. The earthly remains of the saint, the relics that are the object of veneration, are thus much more than symbols: they are the actual presence of a saint in this world. On the other hand, no one expects a cultural saint to perform miracles posthumously; cultural saints may have an (indirect) effect on individuals, but they certainly do not possess a transcendent life after death. Thus, the handling of relics, which is very important in both forms of cult, does not carry the same weight with cultural saints as it does with religious saints.

This difference seems fundamental, but it is not the only one. It is

worth noting, for example, that the cults of cultural saints are hopelessly misogynistic: Christianity has added numerous female saints to their male counterparts over time, whereas female cultural saints hardly exist.[16] Another important difference is that Christian saints are primarily canonized for their exemplary, virtuous lives, martyrdom, miracles, and so on (*vitae*), and only in exceptional cases for their works (e.g., theological writings), whereas the canonization of cultural saints is primarily based on their works (*opera*). Conversely, the lives of cultural saints do not necessarily resemble the lives of saints; in fact, sometimes the opposite is true: from a moral point of view, cultural saints' biographies are so shameful that only the process of canonization invents the appropriate rhetoric to justify them.[17]

These differences indicate that the reference to sacred traditions associated with the term *cultural saint* should not be taken literally. In some cases it is very appropriate, but in others different terms apply, such as *idol*, *icon*, *hero*, or *prophet*.[18] In the words of Thomas Carlyle: "Hero, Prophet, Poet—many different names, in different times and places, do we give to Great Men."[19] Cultural saints, therefore, must be seen in a larger context and in relation to other types of personalities who have also become objects of veneration and deification—for example, legendary heroes, rulers, and statesmen.

The veneration and canonization of cultural saints played a prominent role in the formation of modern national literary cultures. They helped the protagonists of national movements convince their compatriots that they were part of a special identity community distinct from others, and that this specific identity defined their existence in fundamental and profound ways. Studying this phenomenon, then, makes it possible to better understand the historical dynamics of national movements and to better explain the reasons for their (political) success or failure. In this sense, it is possible to complement the established picture in which a prominent role is attributed to the development of national institutions (such an emphasis could be attributed, for example, to Joep Leerssen's research on cultural nationalism) or to the media (this would be, somewhat simplified, a central emphasis according to Benedict Anderson). The efforts to build the infrastructure of a developed national culture are certainly the rational core of the "national revivals." In a sense, cultural saints and their cults represent the reverse side of this matrix, its emotionally charged pole, which mediated a living experience of belonging to new forms of community through commemorative rituals. This experience could become quite concrete, even physical, and thus go beyond Benedict Anderson's abstract notion of a "horizontal" affiliation with a multitude of unknown people, made possible—through codified literary language—by a newspaper or a novel.[20]

The cultural saints were not capable of performing miracles. Nonetheless, their "posthumous powers" have contributed to fundamental social changes in the last two centuries, especially to the formation of the symbolic imaginary and the collective memory of a new type of community: the nation. Especially for small ethnic communities with weak historical traditions, quasi-secular saintly cults meant more than just an eccentric fad—they developed into one of their survival strategies. But how does the appearance of cultural saints fit into the overall picture of venerating great figures in the nation-building period?

16
Among the numerous European "national" poets, one finds only two women: the Galician poet Rosalía de Castro and the Estonian Lydia Koidula. The same is true for other arts: there are practically no intense female cults. An important reason for this is the narrow basis for "sanctity" that results from women's limited access to the world of arts and science.

17
Dović and Helgason, *National Poets*, 103–4.

18
Poets as (national) prophets—such a label fits perfectly, for example, for Adam Mickiewicz, Hayim Nahman Bialik, and Sándor Petőfi—were written about by the distinguished historian of nationalism Hans Kohn, who elaborates on this connection in *Prophets and Peoples. Studies in Nineteenth Century Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1946).

19
Carlyle, *On Heroes*, 126–27.

20
In this sense, it seems that the history of (cultural) nationalism has not yet adequately evaluated the cultural saints, their cults, and their canonization. The reason for this could also be a certain uneasiness caused by the para-religious features of supposedly secular cults.

II. National Pantheons

Looking at the phenomenon of cultural saints more broadly, it is clear that they only cover a portion of the personalities that have been the subject of nationalist commemoration. Cultural saints have indeed grown in the new context because they have been elevated to a pedestal by the inner logic of cultural nationalism. However, nations, the new imagined communities, also incorporated into their commemorative frameworks other kinds of personalities that had long before been the objects of veneration. These were mainly kings and other secular rulers, generals, military leaders and other kinds of heroes, saints, and religious dignitaries, but also travelers, explorers, scientists, and inventors. All these personalities joined together to form new entities, which the protagonists of the national movements envisioned as a kind of pantheon of the nation's "great men." Women were rare among them—so rare that in this respect Carlyle's term *great men* or the inscription *grands hommes* on the portico of the secularized Paris Panthéon seem quite appropriate. In the nineteenth century, the celebration of the nation's great men became the celebration of the nation itself—and the material pantheons provided remarkable realms of memory for the emerging national cult.

What actually is a pantheon? The original Greek word is composed of the words *pân* ("all") and *theîon* ("divine, of the gods"). Thus, the word *pantheon* literally means ("of all the gods"). The history of the use of the term is extremely varied and complex, but in contemporary usage the word primarily refers to two things: a) the gods of a community or people (e.g., the Mesopotamian, Roman, Greek, Norse, or Slavic pantheon), or b) a temple dedicated to the gods of a community (e.g., the Roman Pantheon). In a secondary, somewhat figurative (and secularized) sense, the term *pantheon* no longer refers to deities, but to a group of famous people. Again, it can refer to either a) a group of important individuals (e.g., the pantheon of Italian painters, the pantheon of American movie legends, etc.), or b) an object in which the nation's famous dead are buried or represented in the form of monuments (e.g., the National Pantheon in Lisbon). Thus, the semantic range of the word primarily lies in the intersection between a pantheon as a subject (a group of gods or secular deities) or as an object (a site) and a pantheon as a religious or secular category:

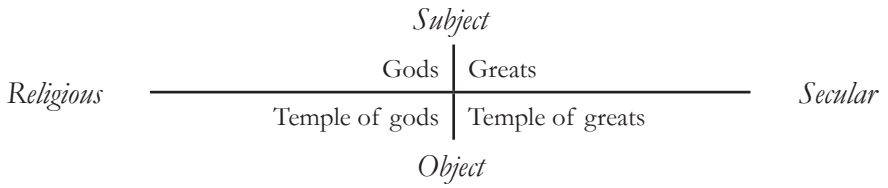


Fig. 1. Semantic range of the word *pantheon*.

Previous research on pantheons has often focused on the "objective" aspect; that is, buildings that served to represent and worship selected major figures. Moreover, the focus has been on the most obvious and influential examples from western Europe. As I show below, it would be useful to expand this framework not only geographically but also conceptually.

"The Big Four": Rome, Paris, London, and Regensburg[21]

In search of the source from which most modern pantheonic ideas, including nationalist ones, drew their inspiration, one must certainly first go to Rome—to the mysterious edifice built by Emperor Hadrian on the site of the earlier temple (Agrippa's), the first and only Roman sacred building dedicated to "all the gods."[22] The cult performed in the Pantheon remains shrouded in mystery but, as Edmund Thomas's excellent study shows, models for the Roman Pantheon (built c. 117–28) can be found in the ancient Greek temples dedicated to the Olympian Twelve (*dōdekátheon*) and especially in the Antiochian Pantheon, which was most likely a direct model for Rome.[23] After the collapse of the Roman Empire, the former temple retained its sacred character: the emperor in Constantinople granted permission to Pope Boniface IV in 609 to consecrate it as the basilica of Saint Mary and the Martyrs (*Sancta Maria ad Martyres*). The building was thus saved from decay, remained in Catholic use, and, unlike the Pantheon in Paris, was never secularized. Its history is perplexing, and so a look at its current interior—dominated by the tombs of the painter Raphael and a handful of other artists, as well as kings Victor Emmanuel II (the "Father of the Nation") and Umberto I—hides more than it reveals. In the century-long dynamic of funerals, exhumations, and placement and removal of monuments in the basilica, Raphael's burial in 1520 stands out as one of the most important events because it helped shape the idea of a pantheon as an appropriate resting place for great artists.[24] At the beginning of the nineteenth century, this idea, now freed from the relics (so characteristic of Christianity), culminated in the monumental series of sculptures by Antonio Canova. Indeed, between 1809 and 1820, the neoclassical sculptor densely populated the interior of the Pantheon with dozens of herms of famous Italian artists and scholars—from Dante and Giotto to the niche that would eventually pantheonize the postulator of the gallery of the great Italians, Canova himself. However, the questionable coexistence of religious and secular cults in a church in the center of Rome did not please everyone—and the statues were eventually removed.[25]

Another important event that influenced the further development of pantheons at the end of the eighteenth century was the French Revolution. In France, where the cult of the *grands hommes* had already developed under Bourbon rule, the revolutionaries were, not surprisingly, excessively hostile to the former royal pantheon: in the fall of 1793, they carried out the previously unimaginable desecration of the tombs of the hated "tyrants" in Saint Denis's Basilica (*Basilique royale de Saint-Denis*), the old mausoleum of the French kings. However, they also tried to design their own pantheon. As early as 1791, the National Constituent Assembly (*Assemblée nationale constituante*) secularized Sainte Geneviève's Church in Paris, a neoclassical masterpiece by Jacques-Germain Soufflot, dedicated to the city's patron saint, which had been completed shortly before, and transformed it into the Panthéon, where the mortal remains of outstanding French citizens would be interred. On April 4, the assembly declared that the former religious building should become a "temple of the nation" and an "altar of liberty," and it had a new inscription placed above the entrance: *Aux grands hommes la patrie reconnaissante* ("To its great men, a grateful fatherland"). Mirabeau's magnificent funeral followed the same day. However, as the botched history of the Paris Panthéon shows, the fate of the relics of politicians and revolutionaries was uncertain: the mortal remains of the now celebrated hero could have ended up in a ditch the very next day. This is what happened to Mirabeau and many others,

21
The idea to think these four pantheons together comes from the aforementioned book *Public Pantheons* of Evelin G. Bouwers.

22
On the building, cf. William L. MacDonald, *The Pantheon: Design, Meaning, and Progeny* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

23
Edmund Thomas, "From the Pantheon of Gods to the Pantheon of Rome," in *Pantheons*, 11–34.

24
On Raphael and subsequent artistic burials, cf. Susanna Pasquali, "From the Pantheon of Artists to the Pantheon of Illustrious Men: Raphael's Tomb and Its Legacy," in *Pantheons*, 35–56.

25
Bouwers, *Public Pantheons*, 132–60; the list of herms: 235–37. In the complex political context, Canova's "greats" soon had to leave the church; today, they are housed in the Capitoline Museums.

including Jean-Paul Marat, whose martyr cult was elevated to the level of Christian saint cults in the course of the Jacobin de-Christianization campaign.[26] Simplifying the checkered history of the Paris Panthéon, it can be said that the least controversial category in the long run was that of the artists, who generally retained a permanent place in the building. First and foremost was Voltaire, whose famous funeral on July 11, 1791, can be considered the continental prototype of the secular emulation of a saint's *translatio*. He was followed in 1794 by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who had previously been buried on Poplar Island (*Île des Peupliers*) near Ermenonville (a commemorative cult flourished there in the sixteen years following the writer's death), and somewhat later the burial of Victor Hugo (1885) enjoyed great popularity. The whirlwind of political and ideological perturbations of the nineteenth century, the resacralization of the church, the "banalization" under Napoleon, when relatively insignificant bureaucrats were buried there, and the development of Les Invalides as a competing military-political pantheon all contributed to the Paris Panthéon not becoming representative—like the one in Rome, it simply does not cover the totality of national "deities" by a long shot.[27]

Another influential phase in the development of pantheons took place in London. The famous Westminster Abbey, the millennial center of monarchical and religious life on the island (the scene of coronations, royal weddings, and funerals), became a vast cemetery for prominent figures in British history over the centuries. Among the more than three thousand buried there today, there are at least sixteen monarchs and eight prime ministers, as well as eminent military figures, scientists, and artists. Since 1400, when Geoffrey Chaucer, the author of the famous *Canterbury Tales*, was buried there, the so-called Poet's Corner had also been developing in the church.[28] The southern transept gradually filled with monuments to important British cultural and especially literary figures, many of whom (including Shakespeare) were represented only by monuments or plaques—and thus an artistic pantheon of the combined kind was created.[29] In an effort to establish a "national temple of fame," the state took a more active role in the late eighteenth century in developing pantheons, which until then had primarily been the domain of the church. Overcrowding at Westminster Abbey prompted the British Parliament to pantheonize another important London church, St. Paul's Anglican Cathedral (the seat of the bishop of London). In this case, too, no secularization took place: both churches retained their sacred purpose but evolved into (secular) national pantheons with the physical presence of relics. The selection of personalities in St. Paul's Cathedral reflects the spirit of imperial and colonial superpower, and it shows how the politics of the time envisioned the temple of glory, in that it was primarily limited to military dignitaries and placed famous army commanders and admirals, preferably nobles with the highest military ranks, at the center of commemoration—its major *exempla virtutis* being the heroes of the Napoleonic wars.[30]

Walhalla, a magnificent neo-classicist temple on the picturesque Bräuberg above the Danube at Donaustauf, a village near the renowned Bavarian city of Regensburg, has a very different appearance. The solutions that King Ludwig I of Bavaria, its great patron (and also main financier), and the architect Leo von Klenze realized in it differ considerably from those mentioned so far. In this case, it is not a (former) church, but a completely new building erected for the purpose of a pantheon. The

26
On quasi-religious festivals, cf. Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

27
Bouwers, *Public Pantheons*, 91–131, 230–34. On additional aspects of the French cult of *grands hommes*, cf. Dominique Poulot, "Pantheons in Eighteenth-Century France: Temple, Museum, Pyramid," in *Pantheons*, 123–45.

28
Thomas Prendergast, *Poetical Dust: Poets' Corner and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

29
On Westminster Abbey, cf. Matthew Craske, "Westminster Abbey 1720–70: A Public Pantheon Built upon Private Interest," in *Pantheons*, 57–79.

30
Bouwers, *Public Pantheons*, 45–90, burials at both locations (1793–1823), 226–29. On St. Paul's Cathedral, cf. also Holger Hoock, "The British Military Pantheon in St Paul's Cathedral: The State, Cultural Patriotism, and the Politics of National Monuments," in *Pantheons*, 81–105.

idea preoccupied the Bavarian ruler, who envisioned Walhalla as a monument to the victory over the French and at the same time as a symbol of the growing Bavarian power in the German context, since 1807, and the spectacular structure (construction lasted from 1830 until the ceremonial opening on October 18, 1842) represents the peak of pantheon fever in post-revolutionary Europe. The abandonment of relics—a move that might have slightly deprived the project of a sacred dimension—allowed the design to achieve a conceptual roundness: it was possible to include all people without having to face the expensive and difficult handling of relics. (Similarly, relics were absent in the Munich *Ruhmeshalle*, the hall of famous Bavarians, commissioned by the same king and opened in 1853, which with its colonnade design induced a new, later increasingly popular "hall-of-fame" type of a pantheon). The main criteria for including an individual in Walhalla were "greatness" and belonging to the realm of the "German language," and the spectrum of pantheonized individuals included two millennia of figures from the broadly understood German(ic) cultural sphere. Very importantly, women were not excluded. Thus, politicians, rulers, scientists, and artists—from Germanic leaders of antiquity (Arminius and Marboduus) to Ludwig's contemporaries—are represented by herms in the Walhalla in a fairly balanced manner, and the collection was later added to and today includes 130 busts and sixty-five commemorative plaques.[31] Although Ludwig was a Catholic king, his "Teutonic" temple flirts quite openly with pagan traditions: whereas the architecture of Walhalla is modeled on the ancient Greek Parthenon, the name of the building and the reliefs on the frieze betray a closeness to Germanic (Norse) mythology. Moreover, the motivation for the temple's construction has unmistakably nationalistic overtones.[32]

31
Bouwers, *Public Pantheons*, 161–212; 238–44.

32
Cf. Hans A. Polsander, *National Monuments and Nationalism in 19th Century Germany* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009).

"The Others": From Mtatsminda to Þingvellir

These four major examples largely framed the pantheon solutions in Europe during the long nineteenth century but, as shall be seen, far from completely.[33] Inspired by Westminster Abbey and the Paris Panthéon, the Pantheon of Illustrious Men (*El Panteón de Hombres Ilustres*), planned since 1837, was inaugurated in Madrid in 1869. Like Walhalla, it was conceived systematically. The list of candidates was drawn up by a commission of experts but, unlike the German project, it also included the presence of relics. Although many much-desired mortal remains could not be found (of Miguel de Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and Diego Velázquez), the relics of some major literary figures (including Garcilaso de la Vega, Francisco Quevedo, and Pedro Calderón de la Barca) and political leaders arrived in an imposing procession at the Royal Basilica of Saint Francis the Great (*Real Basílica de San Francisco el Grande*) on June 20. The project, based mainly on liberal and democratic values, did not get off to a good start due to tumultuous political disputes. Thus, it was only after 1890 that the idea was partially revived at a new location in Madrid, the Royal Basilica of Our Lady of Atocha (*Real Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Atocha*), where the Spanish Pantheon (*Panteón de España*, as it is now called) is still located today. However, its focus remains primarily political.[34]

During the First Portuguese Republic, a pantheon was established in Lisbon that followed the example of Paris: in 1916, Saint Engratia's Church (*Igreja de Santa Engrácia*) was secularized and proclaimed the new National Pantheon (*Panteão Nacional*). Its design emphasized republican values and the new symbols of national identity. The range of personalities

33
The "Stockholm Pantheon," already envisioned in 1791 by Swedish King Gustav III as a royal funeral church, was designed by the architect Eric Palmstedt as a replica of the Roman Pantheon. However, due to the assassination of the king in 1792, the project was not realized.

34
Caroline P. Boyd, "Un lugar de memoria olvidado: el Panteón de Hombres Ilustres en Madrid," *Historia y política* 11 (2004): 15–40. Cf. lso Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos, "Ramón de Mesonero Romanos y el Panteón de hombres ilustres," *Anales de Literatura Española Anales de Literatura Española* 18 (2005): 37–51.

buried there is wide: in addition to presidents (Manuel de Arriaga, Teófilo Braga, Sidónio Pais, and Óscar Carmona), artists are also represented (e.g., the literary figures João de Deus, Almeida Garrett, Guerra Junqueiro, Aquilino Ribeiro, and Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen); among the newer inclusions are the female fado singer Amália Rodrigues and the soccer player Eusébio. In addition to the personalities represented by genuine relics, there are also those represented only by monuments: for example, Luís de Camões, Afonso de Albuquerque, and Vasco da Gama.[35]

The Italian example is also interesting. As has been seen, the Roman Pantheon, which carried the name and concept throughout the world, never became a true national pantheon. However, the function of a (cultural) pantheon has been taken over to some extent by Holy Cross Basilica (*Basilica di Santa Croce*) in Florence, which over the centuries has established itself as a burial place for great artists and intellectuals: Michelangelo and Galileo Galilei, among many others, were buried there. In the course of the nineteenth century, after the great romanticist Ugo Foscolo imagined it as the pantheon of Italian glory in his poem *Dei Sepolcri* (Sepulchres, 1807), this Florentine church quickly filled with monuments. After the unification of Italy, the collection was enlarged by the "repatriation" of precious relics: in 1881, the mortal remains of Ugo Foscolo were transferred from London, in 1887, those of Gioachino Rossini from Paris, and so on. On the contrary, Venetian "pantheon" Saints John and Paul Basilica (*Basilica dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo*) is clearly focused on rulers: it houses the tombs of twenty-five doges, as well as military leaders, politicians, and a few nobles—but, despite the extraordinary cultural pulse of *La Serenissima*, only a handful of artists keep them company. Finally, the Roman *Vittoriano*, whose construction began in 1885, is conceived as a (secular) temple dedicated to a united Italy, but on the altar of the fatherland, instead of a multitude of greats, only the royal "Father of the Fatherland" (*Padre della Patria*), Victor Emmanuel II (who, significantly, is buried in Hadrian's Pantheon), and an unknown soldier are celebrated.

Moving toward central Europe, the picture becomes even more dynamic. Wawel Cathedral in Kraków, seat of the Archdiocese of Krakow and arguably the most important sanctuary of Polish Catholicism, resembles the model of Westminster Abbey in many ways. The magnificent crypts of the historic royal residence on Wawel Hill contain the tombs of Polish kings, heroes, generals, and revolutionaries (e.g., Jan III Sobieski, the rebel Tadeusz Kościuszko, Władysław Sikorski, and Marshal Józef Piłsudski, founder of the Second Polish Republic). A counterpoint to this powerful military and political framework is the Crypt of National Poets, located in the same cathedral, where Adam Mickiewicz (translated 1890), a paradigmatic Polish cultural saint, Juliusz Słowacki (translated 1927), and Cyprian Kamil Norwid (translated 2001) are (re)buried. The symbiotic coexistence of religious, political, military, and cultural saints takes place in an overtly sacred context—in a symbolically charged place that symbolizes Polish statehood.

Pantheon cemeteries represent an entirely different trend. These cemeteries were transformed, though often rather accidentally, into pantheons by the aggregation and transfer of monuments and relics and by other architectural interventions. In Pest, Hungary, the public Kerepesi Cemetery (*Kerepesi temető*) was opened as early as 1847 and gradually developed into a pantheon. A series of "national" burials began in 1855 with the poet Mihály Vörösmarty; since then, dignitaries have been

35 Ernesto Castro Leal, "República portuguesa, secularização e novos símbolos (1910–1926)," *História: revista da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto* 11 (2010): 121–34. Cf. also the official website, accessed November 2023, http://www.panteaonacional.gov.pt/.

interred in a designated area and, since the beginning of the twentieth century, mainly in the imposing arcades (built in 1908–1911) and the special artists' area. Although there are many cultural figures among the several hundred Hungarian greats, other profiles are also strongly represented. However, the true dominants of the cemetery, which was declared a "national pantheon" in 1956, are the three mausoleums of the leading politicians and statesmen from the second half of the nineteenth century: Lajos Batthyány, Ferenc Deák, and Lajos Kossuth.[36]

The Czech example is also illustrative, where—as elsewhere in the Habsburg Monarchy—national movements often operated in multiethnic areas and sought to express their power and dominance with national(ized) pantheons. Vyšehrad, an ancient fortress overlooking the Vltava River south of central Prague and a mythical site of the Czech national movement, was gradually transformed into a national cemetery. Since 1861, when the (controversial) philologist Václav Hanka was buried there, Vyšehrad has become the final resting place of many "great Czechs": composers such as Antonín Dvořák and Bedřich Smetana, the painters Alphonse Mucha and Josef Václav Myslbek, and the writers Jaroslav Vrhlický, Karel Hynek Mácha, and Božena Němcová, among others. Especially prominent is Slavín, a monumental collective tomb (built from 1889 to 1893) with the allegorical sculpture *Génia vlasti* (Genius of the Nation)—the idea for which came in the early 1860s from the Svatobor Society, an influential member of which was the historian and politician František Palacký, later considered the "father of the nation." As the "Czech Pantheon," Slavín continued to accept new members throughout the twentieth century: as recently as 1996, the composer and conductor Rafael Kubelík was buried there. Among the fifty-five people interred there, poets and writers make up the largest group (twelve). Significantly, as a smaller, subordinate nation in an imperial context, the Czechs seem to have particularly developed the cultural aspect of the pantheon: artists make up the vast majority in the tomb.[37]

The development in Croatia was similar. In Zagreb, Mirogoj Cemetery was opened in 1879, where the architect Herman Bollé laid out magnificent arcades (they were not completed until 1917). The cemetery had already gained national importance in its first year due to the typical saintly *translatio*, the second burial of the Romantic poet Petar Preradović. In the autumn of 1885, the Arcade of National Awakeners (*Arkada preporoditelja*) was completed, where the mortal remains of Ljudevit Gaj, Stanko Vraz, Živko Vukasović, Vjekoslav Babukić, Fran Kurelac, Vatroslav Lisinski, Dragutin Seljan, and Dimitrije Demeter were ceremonially reburied. The cemetery continued to fill with patriotic relics, and the selection of persons was made by the municipal authorities.[38]

Analogous (although somewhat later) transformations can be observed in Ljubljana. The old city cemetery next to Saint Christopher's Church (*Sveti Krištof*) was one of the first in the Habsburg Monarchy to receive monumental arcades in the fashionable Italian *campo santo* style in the mid-1860s. However, the arcades initially served as the final resting place for members of the predominantly German Carniolan upper class. When the new Holy Cross Cemetery (now called Žale) was built at the beginning of the twentieth century, this also led to the piecemeal degradation of the former burial site. After the collapse of the monarchy, the Navje memorial park was planned on the old cemetery, which the architect Jože Plečnik envisioned as a "grove of illustrious men" (*gaj zaslužnih mož*).

36
Today, most of the cemetery has been turned into a park, and the most important monuments are protected. Cf. Imola Gecse-Tarmsc and Ágnes Bechtold, "The Hungarian National Graveyard (Budapest) as a Public Park," *Teka Komisji Urbanistyki i Architektury Oddziału Polskiej Akademii Nauk w Krakowie* 54 (2016): 187–93.

37
Marek Nekula, "Constructing Slavic Prague: The 'Green Mountain Manuscript' and Public Space in Discourse," *Bohemia* 52, no. 1 (2012): 22–36; Marek Nekula, *Tod und Auferstehung einer Nation: Der Traum vom Pantheon in der tschechischen Literatur und Kultur* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2017); and Tomáš Bubík, "A Graveyard as a Home to Ghosts or a Subject of Scholarly Research? The Czech National Cemetery at Vyšehrad," *Changing Societies & Personalities* 4, no. 2 (2020): 136–57.

38
Cf. also the official website, accessed November 2023, https://www.gradskagroblja.hr/pocetak-gradnje-arkada-758/758.

Due to various circumstances, Plečnik's pantheonic "cemetery of honor" was not realized in its full monumentality. Nevertheless, in the late 1930s, the tombstones of many great Slovenians (most of whom had previously been scattered in the cemetery) and the mortal remains of others were moved to the restored arcades of the Navje Memorial Park, where artists and cultural figures, especially literary greats (some of whom were commemorated in a collective "writers' tomb"), clearly predominate. In this respect, Ljubljana's Navje resembles the Vyšehrad case.[39]

The idea of a pantheon cemetery reached the borders of Europe and beyond, and it had an impact well into the twentieth century. In Georgia, a pantheon was created on Mtatsminda Hill above the city center of Tbilisi as a "symbol of Georgia's collective identity," with monumental tombs of writers and public figures. It had been planned since the late nineteenth century and was built in the 1920s.[40] As part of the cult of national greats, the newly founded state of Israel also created a cemetery—the "Zionist Pantheon," which, unlike the cemeteries mentioned so far, is almost exclusively political in character. Its main figure is Theodor Herzl, the visionary and "father" of the Jewish state, whose bones were ceremoniously transferred from Vienna in 1949. Among the eight sites across the country that competed for the prestigious relics, the topographically dominant hill, the highest point in Jerusalem (now named after Herzl), on which the park was built, occupies to this day the position of a sacralized epicenter of the state's territory.[41] In Iceland, where a nineteenth-century initiative to reinstate the parliament (*Alþingi*) in rural Þingvellir (rather than the town of Reykjavík) failed, the government attempted to transform the old center of Icelandic parliamentarianism into a pantheon cemetery. In 1940, the poet Einar Benediktsson was buried there, and in 1946, after grotesque complications, the remains of the "national poet" Jonas Hallgrímson, which had lain in Copenhagen for a long century, were added. However, that was it, more or less: Þingvellir, now a major tourist attraction, did not become a real pantheon.[42]

39
Milena Piškur and Sonja Žitko, *Ljubljansko Navje* (Ljubljana: DZS, 1997); Tina Potočnik and Tanja Simonič Korošak, "Arkade na Navju. Monumentalna pokopališka arhitektura 19. stoletja in Plečnikova predelava," *Kronika* 68, no. 2 (2020): 241–56.

40
Nino Chikovani, "The Mtatsminda Pantheon: A Memory Site and Symbol of Identity," *Caucasus Survey* 9, no. 3 (2020): 235–49.

41
Maoz Azaryahu, "Mount Herzl: The Creation of Israel's National Cemetery," *Israel Studies* 1, no. 2 (1996): 46–74; Doron Bar, "Zionist Pantheons? The Design and Development of the Tombs of Herzl, Weizmann and Rothschild During the Early Years of the State of Israel," *Israel Studies* 25, no. 2 (2020): 72–94.

42
Dović and Helgason, *National Poets*, 177–85.

Pantheons: Between Idea and Materialization

Material pantheons continue the ancient practice of burying and/or commemorating "great men" in symbolically invested spaces. Nationalism in the nineteenth century arguably accelerated this process by aligning it ever more clearly with the new concept of the nation. National pantheons as physical sites—whether temples or pantheon cemeteries—were conceived as places of pilgrimage where people could experience a deep attachment to their nation and its glorious past and identify with its exemplary heroes. As can be seen, different strategies were employed, and pantheonic aspirations encountered various obstacles in reality. Sacred objects, for example, were controlled by the church, which was not necessarily enthusiastic about the development of (secular) cults of private fame; the transformation of cemeteries was expensive and time-consuming; the grandiose ambitions of national movements collided in practice with their financial impotence; various political principles (be they liberal or conservative) and broader concepts of social structure (republican or monarchist) confronted each other; and, finally, there were the conflicting interests of the pantheon's commissioners or "postulators," who, as a rule, also tended to glorify themselves along with the pantheons. It is therefore not surprising that ideas materialized with very different levels of success.

However, it should be noted again that a pantheon in general does not

necessarily have to be a material place (Walhalla or Vyšehrad Cemetery) but can also be a group of "deities" (e.g., the pantheon of Greek gods). Although the actual structure of this group is often difficult to grasp, one of the characteristics of these new communities is that they cultivate the notion of a "national pantheon" as a group of representative individuals (prominent Serbs, famous Norwegians, etc.)—regardless of whether this community of secular deities can be honored by visiting a particular site. Such a pantheon, increasingly subordinated to the national principle in the late nineteenth century, can thus be thought of as a kind of (Platonic) idea that can be realized in a concrete pantheon (temple), a pantheon cemetery, a hall of fame with colonnades and busts, or in other ways; for example, in the form of a portrait gallery, an avenue with statues, a wax doll museum,[43] painted ceiling frescoes, or decoration of national institutions (e.g., the curtains of the Croatian National Theater in Zagreb, painted by Vlaho Bukovac in 1895).

From this perspective, the Belgian example is illustrative, where the idea of the pantheon found wide resonance in sculpture, but also in other media. The examples of Paris and London fueled the desire for a physical pantheon and, under the vivid impression of Walhalla, the monarchical elite actually planned such a pantheon—but the idea was never realized. Instead, sculptural pantheons experienced a veritable boom: toward the end of the 1830s, a series of statues of great Belgians, commissioned by a royal decree, were designed and distributed throughout the country, and by mid-century in Brussels, a series of statues glorifying a number of nationally important figures were placed in both the capital's new National Museum and in its parliament buildings. A series of busts for the Royal Academy in Brussels was also designed as a pantheon, and in other cities (Louvain, Bruges, Ypres, and Ghent) busts of the "greats" filled the empty niches of restored Gothic townhouses. The striking fashion for sculpted pantheons was supplemented by painted pantheons, frescoes, miniature statues, and, from 1840 on, the *Panthéon national* book series, in which *Les Belges illustres* (The Famous Belgians) was published in three volumes.[44] The tendency to create portrait galleries in the style of pantheons also existed elsewhere—for example, in Hungary;[45] a comparative study would probably show that it was a broader, pan-European phenomenon.

A particular example of a monumental sculptural pantheon that is entirely political is the American Mount Rushmore National Memorial in remote South Dakota, which contains the giant heads of four presidents (Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt, and Lincoln) carved into the mountain massif between 1927 and 1941.[46] On the other hand, the monumental architectural design of the center of Washington D.C. has also been considered a "national pantheon" with sacral dimensions,[47] as has the Smithsonian National Museum of American History in the United States capital—for the pantheon is not necessarily a temple; it can also be realized through a museum setting that "enshrines and deifies and even idolatrizes human beings."[48] However, the most successful pantheonic concept in North America was evidently the "hall of fame," of which the earliest example is the Hall of Fame for Great Americans in the Bronx, started in 1901. Inspired by the Bavarian Hall of Fame (*Ruhmeshalle*), it was designed as a growing gallery of busts of the "national greats," whose selection was entrusted to the board of electors.[49]

A pantheon can also be designed as a single sculpture, as shown by the Kremlin in Novgorod, with its imposing fifteen-meter-high monument

43
Cf. Uta Kornmeier, "Madame Tussaud's as a Popular Pantheon," in *Pantheons*, 147–65. Madame Tussaud's wax pantheon was, of course, not "national" but rather "popular" in its predominantly commercial design.

44
Jo Tollebeek and Tom Verschaffel, "Group Portraits with National Heroes: The Pantheon as an Historical Genre in Nineteenth-Century Belgium," *National Identities* 6, no. 2 (2004): 91–106. In an excellent study, the authors define the pantheon as "a common denomination for these diverse types of ensembles of (historical) greats"; they bring together people from different historical periods that "contributed to the rise of the fatherland and embodied the identity of the nation in an admirable and glorious way" (92). The authors also analyze the hierarchy of pantheonized individuals in terms of the different types of heroes (warriors, statesmen, artists, and scholars). The history of the Belgian pantheon inevitably became more complicated with the rise of Flemish nationalism in the twentieth century.

45
Éva Bicskei, "The Formation of the National Pantheon: Portrait Galleries of County Halls, City Halls, and Clubs in Nineteenth Century Hungary," *Acta Historiae Artium Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 49, no. 1 (2008): 305–36.

46
Michael Fellman, "The Earthbound Eagle: Andrew Jackson and the American Pantheon," *American Studies* 12, no. 2 (1971): 67–76. According to Fellman, the major heroes of the American (political) pantheon are three presidents—Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln: "As members of the American Pantheon, these three demi-gods exemplify transcendent national qualities" (68).

47
Anna Minta, "Planning a National Pantheon: Monuments in Washington, D.C. and the Creation of Symbolic Space," *Architecture—Technology—Culture* 3 (2009): 21–50.

48
Albert Murray, "The Vernacular Imperative: Duke Ellington's Place in the National Pantheon," *Callaloo* 14, no. 4 (1991): 771–75.

49
In the course of the twentieth century, hundreds of halls of fame (sometimes also walls or walks of fame) for various areas (sports, music, and art) were established in both the US and Canada.

Tysyacheletiye Rossii (Millennium of Russia) in the form of a *globus cruciger*, erected in 1862 as part of the (self-)glorification of Russian statehood. The hundred-ton bronze giant, glorifying Russia's monarchical past, features 129 historical figures, with rulers and religious and military leaders dominating; many artists are also represented, but they take a hierarchically subordinate role to the world of high politics. Half a century later, political dominance became even more apparent in the new Bolshevik pantheon, which focused primarily on two revolutionary deities—Lenin and Stalin.[50]

Finally, a pantheon can be realized in a series of books—like *Les Belges illustres* or *Znameniti Slovenci* (Famous Slovenians)—or, as in the case of *Ukrayins'kyy panteon* (Ukrainian Pantheon), in the form of a single book.[51] The idea of collected works of nationally important artists, found in practically all European literary cultures, also bears pantheonic traits: until the end of the nineteenth century, nationalism encouraged the writing of national literary histories centering on the "literary greats."[52] In this context, of course, it should be borne in mind that the creation and promotion of national pantheons (or, in this case, canons) was in great part motivated by the global "competition" between nations (already initiated with Herderian thought)—hence the countless disputes over the appropriation of celebrities.[53]

The above overview is fairly partial and far from exhaustive. However, it certainly demonstrates at least two things: the great variety of manifestations of the "pantheonic imagination"—to use Eveline G. Bouwers' apt expression—and the fact that research into national pantheons would necessarily have to be broad and comparative. Such research would undoubtedly be very useful from the point of view of many disciplines, especially history (political, cultural, and artistic), memory studies, nationalism studies, and, last but not least, religious studies.

A Comparative Study of National Pantheons

If one wishes to empirically grasp national pantheons in their various manifestations in order to better compare them, several methodological dilemmas arise. The first is the following: what exactly should be considered a *national* pantheon? Here it is certainly useful to focus on their commissioners; in general, one can consider national only those pantheons that were inspired by national thought in a broader sense, and especially those that were planned and propagated by the protagonists of national movements. This guideline can also help in the chronological classification of the phenomenon, which—similar to the cults of cultural saints—experienced its peak in the second half of the nineteenth century, but whose offshoots may extend here and there to a few decades before or after.[54]

Even greater difficulties arise when trying to determine the structure of a particular national pantheon. There are no definite answers and no universal methods. Of course, it is useful to start from the material pantheons, but these are unreliable because of the complexity of their formation; they tend to remain a chronically incomplete source. It is therefore necessary to consider other forms of pantheons, from sculptural and pictorial to "discursive"—after all, the contours of the pantheon that Antonio Canova attempted to create in marble were partly sketched much earlier by Giorgio Vasari in his famous book of artists' biographies. As with the canonization of cultural saints, in assessing the degree of "pantheonization," one must consider a complex interplay of factors ranging from major public

50
Brandon Taylor, "Rise and Fall of the Soviet Pantheon," in *Pantheons*, 221–42.

51
In *Ukrayins'kyy panteon* (Kyiv: Baltia, numerous editions), Sergey Szegeda discusses forty-three key figures of Ukrainian history and art from the time of Kievan Rus to the present. Significantly, the cover depicts the Virgin Mary uniting Ukrainian dignitaries under her mantle.

52
On national pantheons as book collections, cf. Dragos Jipa, "The Transnational Construction of National Pantheons," in *Literary Transnationalism(s)*, ed. Dagmar Vandebosch and Theo D'haen (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 121–31.

53
Was Mickiewicz a Polish or Lithuanian "national poet"? Is the inventor Tesla Serbian or Croatian? And so on.

54
The controversial "Skopje 2014" monument series, installed by the government (i.e., the ruling nationalist party VMRO-DPMNE) in the capital of North Macedonia, is a somewhat belated reenactment of a sculpted open-air national pantheon.

monuments and street names to rituals, reprints, banknotes, stamps, and, quite importantly, school curricula (history, literature, and art).[55]

In any case, if one considers the structure of the national pantheons, it can be seen that they include various personality types. As presented in the "Chart of Immortality," the figures commemorated traditionally belonged to one of four groups: religion, politics, warfare, and arts/culture.[56] Whereas the first group, religious figures (gods, religious leaders, saints), has been sacralized by definition, and (secular) rulers and military leaders in particular have been subject to sacral forms of commemoration since antiquity (e.g., Egyptian or Roman emperors), modern nations have incorporated two relatively new types of "deities" into their pantheons. The first type is represented by cultural saints (poets, writers, artists, composers, scholars, inventors, and explorers); although not entirely new, it is the increased intensity of worship that distinguishes the new cults in the national context from past forms of veneration. The second change was the expansion of the scope of political celebrities: not only kings and victorious generals, but also other types of political figures became important: presidents, political leaders, national leaders, and revolutionaries; in the new, national context, this second type could be called patriot (or republican) saints. The first type is most vividly embodied by the figure of the "national poet," and the second type is perhaps best represented by the figure of the "father of the nation"—a unique position important to many national movements, especially smaller ones.[57]

Conversely, the formal typology of national pantheons, as revealed in their various materializations, can be outlined by considering two contrasting traits: the first concerns the presence (or absence) of the mortal remains of pantheonized individuals, whereas the second concerns the form of materialization, which ranges from the (architectural) temple on the one hand to many other solutions that do not imitate the temple form. This yields four quadrants that the existing pantheon configurations can be classified into:

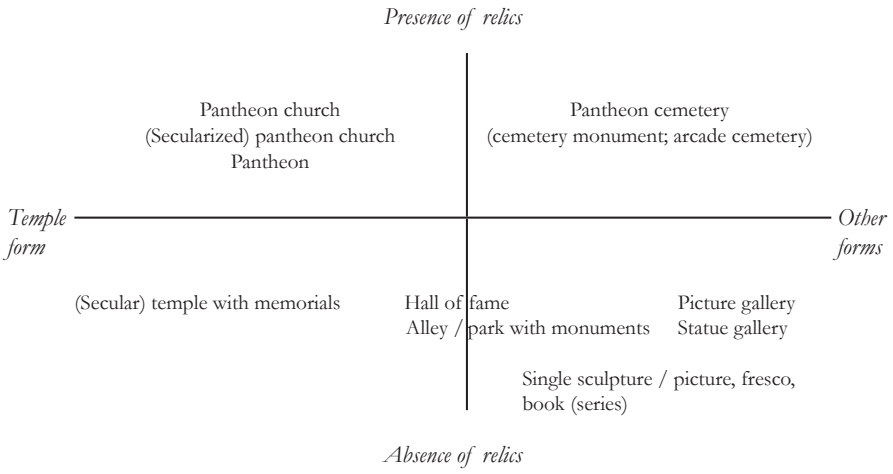


Fig. 2. Classification of pantheon configurations.

The starting points outlined above naturally open up a number of questions that could be adequately answered by comparative research. How variable is the structure of national pantheons, and how does it change across space and time? Are there specific differences, for example, between northern and southern Europe, or between Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox cultures?

55
Cf. the canonization model in Dović and Helgason, *National Poets*, 94–95. A major source for research on European monuments is the (online) *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism:*, accessed November 2023, https://ernie.uva.nl. National pantheons seem to be one of the natural possibilities to expand the *Encyclopedia*.

56
Dović and Helgason, *National Poets*, 194.

57
Historically, "father of the nation" is linked to the ancient Roman tradition of honoring outstanding individuals (mostly emperors) with the title *pater patriae*.

What are the differences between "large" nations, where national movements could draw on rich monarchical and imperialist traditions, and "small," dominated nations, where political emancipation overdetermined the nationalist process? How and when (if at all) do women enter the national pantheons? Another interesting question is whether the pantheons are hierarchically structured: are the deities in them at least roughly equal, such as the Greek Olympian Twelve (*Dōdekátheon*) or the gods of the central Norse pantheon (*Æsir*), or is worship concentrated on individual, highly elevated deities—for example, the "father of the nation" or the "national poet"? In other words, are the national pantheons monotheistic or polytheistic in nature? Which type of saints predominates: patriot or cultural? Finally, what is the degree of sacralization—are there significant differences in the way each national movement incorporates ritual and other religious elements into the commemoration of its "pantheonized"? What is the role of relics of various saint types, and do they receive excessive attention (solemn *translatio*, repatriation, and ritual veneration)? What kinds of relationships (conflictual or symbiotic?) have been developing between (increasingly) secular states and local religious institutions?

Fig. 3. Giusto de' Menabuoi, *Paradise*, ca. 1378. Ceiling fresco in the Baptistery dome of Saint Anthony of Padua Basilica, Padua. Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Pantheons change over time. Even the twelve Greek Olympians were not completely fixed—more than forty deities have occasionally been counted among them.[58] In Christianity, which is a monotheistic religion in principle, emphases also change with time and place: what role will be played by Mary, or by this or that saint? The ceiling fresco in the dome of the baptistery dome of Saint Anthony of Padua Basilica, painted by Giusto de' Menabuoi in the late fourteenth century, is dominated by Christ Pantocrator—one of the three persons of the Holy Trinity. However, Christ is by no means alone in Paradise:

58 Thomas, "From the Pantheon," 12.

he is surrounded by Mary, angels, and numerous saints. Of course, the early Renaissance master knew very well for whom he was painting. If he had been commissioned by a national leader of the late nineteenth century to paint a dome with the heroes of the "national pantheon," he would have placed a variety of cultural and patriot saints within it—according to the wishes of his client. And, if he had had to paint the dome according to the dictates of the Soviet revolutionaries at the beginning of the twentieth century, of course, it would look quite different. And what would it look like today? As the online "Pantheon" project suggests, the painting would include many more athletes and entertainers than the earlier religious or nationalist pantheons. In the pantheons of the new millennium, even rulers and politicians have to make way for actors, singers, and soccer players.[59]

59
The "Pantheon" website, developed since 2013 at MIT, provides analysis and attractive visualizations of world-renowned personalities. Individuals whose biographies appear on Wikipedia in at least fifteen languages are taken into account; online popularity is measured using the complex Historical Popularity Index (HPI), accessed November 2023, https://pantheon.world/.

Acknowledgements and Funding Details

I would like to thank Jón Karl Helgason and Jernej Habjan for their careful review of the first draft of this article, and Eveline G. Bouwers for helpful comments on the pantheon section.

This work was supported by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) as part of the research program "Studies in Literary History, Literary Theory, and Methodology, P6-0024 (B)."

The Religious Dimensions of the Esperanto Collective Identity

Federico Gobbo

Centro Studi di Civiltà e Spiritualità Comparate
fondazione Giorgio Cini onlus

Federico Gobbo
University of Amsterdam
f.gobbo@uva.nl

Keywords:
Esperanto, Nationalism, Nation-building, Romanticism, Zamenhof, Judaism, Postmodernism

To cite this:
Gobbo, Federico. "The Religious Dimensions of the Esperanto Collective Identity." *Religiographies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2023): 76–89.

Abstract

This paper shows how religious dimensions play a role in shaping the collective identity of Esperanto, the most successful planned language ever. Esperanto is the only project that has succeeded in becoming a full-fledged living language. Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof, its original author, had in mind not only a *ponto-lingvo* ("bridge language") but also and mainly a *pontoreligio* ("bridge religion"). While his first plan eventually became what is known now as Esperanto, the latter—called at first Hillelism, and later Homaranism—turned out to be a spectacular failure in terms of acceptance. Nowadays, while there are Esperanto associations throughout the world, there are neither Hillelist temples nor active Homaranist societies. However, Zamenhof planted a tiny seed of his religious dimension inside the Esperanto community from its inception, called the *interna ideo* ("internal idea"), which flourished within the Esperanto Movement in further religious dimensions, starting from his only daughter, Lidia Zamenhof, a prominent Bahá'í figure. Even if most Esperanto supporters have a "neutralistic" attitude to Esperanto, claiming absolute neutrality concerning religion as well as political views, an anti-essentialist analysis of the Esperanto "national character" paradoxically reveals typical elements of (Romantic) nationalism, such as a hymn and a flag, as well as postmodernist interpretations.

1. Esperanto as a linguistic-cultural artefact

Human beings constantly use languages—whether spoken, signed, written—to connect with others, constructing shared norms of behaviour. Therefore, the understanding of linguistic phenomena passes through not only mere language description but also its usage, including language attitudes and ideologies. The latter may be either overt or covert, and they pertain to both language users and non-users, who also have ideologies concerning language and its users.[1] Even if it may appear counterintuitive at first sight, the Esperanto phenomenon is no exception. In his preface to the bilingual Italian–Esperanto dictionary, Joshua Fishman presents it in these words:[2]

> "I spent most of my professional life researching and writing about minor ethnic languages, that is, languages that are undervalued even by their own speech communities and are sometimes neglected or even persecuted by their own governments. Esperanto was born in the mind of L. L. Zamenhof, a native speaker, teacher, and even researcher of one such language: Yiddish. Sometimes you hear that Esperanto should substitute the many supposedly superfluous ethnic languages; according to this view, Esperanto would be yet another opponent of minor ethnic languages, which already bear an undue load of adversaries. However, we can also consider Esperanto to be the most typical of all interlanguages, languages that act as bridges. As such, Esperanto is against no other language, but, on the contrary, facilitates communication between speakers who share no common language. This is the function of Esperanto, a function that merits everybody's support and admiration."[3]

1
This view of language comes from an interdisciplinary field called the sociology of language. See for example, Joshua A. Fisherman "The Sociology of Language: An Interdisciplinary Social Science Approach to Language in Society," in *Advances in the Sociology of Language*, ed. Joshua A. Fishman, vol. 1, *Basic Concepts, Theories and Problems: Alternative Approaches* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2019), 217–404.

2
Unless stated otherwise, all quotes are author's translation from Esperanto.

3
Joshua A. Fishman, "Antaŭparolo [Preface]," in *Vocabolario Italiano-Esperanto*, ed. Carlo Minnaja (Milano: Cooperativa Editoriale Esperanto, 1996), 7.

Of over a thousand "interlanguage" projects—following Fishman's wording—proposed from the advent of the Scientific Revolution in Europe until the first half of the 20th century, only Esperanto fully succeeded to pass from the stage of a written-only, one-man project to that of a spoken, community-driven, living language.[4] With the important exception of sign languages, human languages build up societies in spoken form before being written; this historical "priority of speech" (Lyons' wording) is systematically violated by interlanguages such as Esperanto, which are therefore attacked as being artificial, in the pejorative sense of unnatural.[5] We maintain that Esperanto is not merely a set of grammatical rules written in a book but a linguistic artefact (without any pejorative connotation!) that has produced—and continues to produce—a culture, intended as a collective effort of making meaning of the world, following the constructive view of culture-as-a-verb.[6] From this starting point, we draw from the existing literature the following preliminary observations. First, Esperanto is a living language, belonging to a specific community of practice: applying Wenger's definition, Esperanto speakers are an aggregate of people who share similar interests in Esperanto as a common practice that shape their participation in the world and their orientation towards it, creating connections between group members in mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and shared repertoires, such as discourses, routines, and rituals.[7] Second, the Esperanto sense of belonging nurtures its community of practice through a collection of language attitudes and ideologies sustaining the creation of Esperanto artefacts, which, ultimately, constitute its culture. Finally, it is worth noting that, in the case of Esperanto, intergenerational transmission occurs mainly outside the domain of the family: the majority of Esperanto speakers consciously choose to become proficient in the language as teenagers or adults. Therefore, in order to understand the Esperanto collective identity, it is crucial to give an account of the sense-making processes behind the Esperanto practice across different contexts, in both time and space.[8]

In this paper, we abstract from linguistic consideration over the Esperanto language, so as to focus specifically on its cultural artefacts. In particular, our main research question is to investigate why religious dimensions often remain as an undercurrent in the main Esperanto discourse while they overwhelmingly arise at specific points through its complex history. The main thesis is that we should go beyond a naïve essentialist view of Esperantism as a homogeneous ideology; on the contrary, we should analyse Esperanto ideologies under the lens of its "cultural history," both in the sense of *Kulturgeschichte*, especially useful for its pioneering stage and classic period, and in the sense of pop culture analysis, which is especially useful for Esperanto postmodernism.[9] Without any pretense of exhausting all aspects of this rather rarely scrutinised topic, we shall see that, in the case of Esperanto, religious dimensions engage in a constant—and passionate—dialogue with nationalistic symbols used to define its ideology of neutralism. An important corollary is that, despite common beliefs, even among Esperanto speakers, its ideology of neutralism is far from being ideologically neutral.

2. Nationalistic matters in the early Esperanto Movement

The choice of using nationalism as a key concept for the Esperanto phenomenon merits an explanation; after all, Zamenhof, who defined himself as the *iniciatoro* of Esperanto, that is, the one who started it, called his project *lingvo internacia*, "international language."[10] Is it paradoxical that the Esperanto

4
The common trait of interlanguages is to be non-ethnic, i.e., not bound to a specific ethnic group. A classic encyclopaedic work registering all interlanguage projects is by Louis Couturat and Léopold Leau, *Histoire de la Langue Universelle* (Paris: Hachette, 1903). Already the second edition has a lot of new projects, most of them ephemeral. A somehow analogous work published almost one century later showed a bunch of new projects, with little or no social impact: Paolo Albani and Berlinghiero Buonarroti, *Aga magèra difùra: Dizionario delle lingue immaginarie* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1994). From the late 1990s, some projects had small revivals under the label of "conlanging," but no significant extra-Internet impact in terms of community formation. Observations that are still valid can be found in: Federico Gobbo, "The Digital Way to Spread Conlangs," in *Language at Work: Language Learning, Discourse and Translation Studies in Internet*, ed. Santiago G. Posteguillo at al. (Castellon: Publicacions de la Universitat Jaume I, 2005), 45–53.

5
Lyons sets the historical and biological priority of speech as the basis of naturalness in languages; see John Lyons, *Language and Linguistics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and John Lyons, *Natural Language and Universal Grammar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). See also discussion in Federico Gobbo, "Are planned languages less complex than natural languages?", *Language Sciences* 60 (2017): 36–52, and Federico Gobbo, "Alan Turing creator of Artificial Languages," *InKoj: Philosophy and Artificial Languages* 3, no. 2 (2012): 181–94. For an in-depth critical analysis from the point of view of philosophy of language, see Ida Stria, "Towards a Linguistic Worldview for Artificial Languages" (PhD thesis, Adam Mickiewicz University, 2015). On the sources of ideological attacks against Esperanto, see Federico Gobbo, "The language ideology of Esperanto: From the world language problem to balanced multilingualism," in *Contested Languages: The Hidden Multilingualism in Europe*, ed. Marco Tamburelli and Mauro Tosco (Amsterdam: John Benjamins), 213–26.

6
This felicitous expression was coined by Brian V. Street, "Culture is a verb: Anthropological aspects of language and cultural process," in *Language and Culture: papers from the annual meeting of the British association of applied linguistics held at Trevelyan college, University of Durham, September 1991,* ed. David Graddol, Linda Thompson, and Mike Byram (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1993): 23–43. An application of the concept on English linguistic competence is found in Judith Mader and Rudi Camerer, "Culture is a verb: The training and testing of intercultural communicative competence," in *Autonomie und Assessment: Erträge des 3. Bremer Symposions zum autonomen Fremdsprachenlernen*, ed. Arntz Reiner, Hans P. Krings, and Bärbel Kühn (Bochum: AKS-Verlag, 2012), 117–29.

7
The notion of Community of Practice was proposed in the 1990s by Penny Eckert and Etienne Wenger in the context of research on learning, then applied to linguistic community as well; see Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

movement shows traits of nationalism from its beginning while having internationalism at its very core? The answer to this question relies on how the pioneers of the Esperanto community of practice structured the first ideological lines while laying the very grounds of the Esperanto Movement;[11] the first two generations of Esperanto speakers (1887–1904 and 1905–1932) started a tradition that cannot be overlooked by subsequent Esperanto speakers.

In 1887, Zamenhof published his language project in Warsaw, at the time part of the Tsarist Empire. That book became known in Esperanto as *Unua Libro*, the First Book, with an all-too-obvious aura of sacrality. In her analysis of its content, O'Keefe convincingly shows, backed up by first-hand sources, that Esperanto was never an exclusively Jewish project.[12] Zamenhof's conscious choice in this regard is confirmed by the letter that Lev N. Tolstoy wrote in 1894 responding to Russian Esperantists on the applicability of Esperanto as *lingvo tutmonda*, a worldwide language. While acknowledging that it is a more rational choice to learn an ad-hoc international language than hoping for a natural convergence on one of the world's many existing languages or widespread plurilingualism among the masses, Tolstoy argued that Esperanto:

> "Appears very easy to any European, [but] for an absolute world language, that is, one to connect Indians, Chinese, African people, etc., another language would be needed. . . . After two hours of studying, I could already, if not write, at least freely read in this language. [. . .] I experienced many times how human beings remained hostile toward each other only because of the barriers against mutual understanding. And, for this reason, learning and propagating Esperanto is without any doubt a Christian matter, which helps to bring about the Kingdom of God, that matter that is the main and only definition of human life."[13]

According to the address book of the readers of the first journal written in the language, significantly entitled *La Esperantisto*, approximately 90% of its subscribers came from the Tsarist Empire and were Russian speakers. It was only in the early years of the 20th century that Western Europeans, in particular the French, superseded Russian Esperantists in number. Another reason this occurred was that in Tsarist Russia of the late 1890s, censorship did not allow publications in a language not listed in the restricted club of approved foreign tongues, and inevitably the centre of the Movement had to move elsewhere. It was only after the Russian Revolution of 1905 that relative freedom of the press made room for publication in Esperanto: the flagship journal became *Ruslanda Esperantisto* (1905–1910), targeting Esperantists "from Russian countries" (so, not necessarily ethnically Russian), which conveyed ideas, in O'Keefe's words, of "patriotic cosmopolitanism" and Esperanto as a "narrow elite pastime."[14] In the tumultuous fin-de-siècle years in Russia, it was a Frenchman who saved the Movement from oblivion: Louis de Beaufront, "the second father of Esperanto." He became an extremely controversial figure in the Esperanto Movement, as he initially devoted himself to the Esperanto Cause (in the language: *l'Afero*), but then left Esperanto for a rival project, called Ido (in the language: offspring). De Beaufront was a fervent Catholic, and he interpreted Esperantism through that religious lens. Evidence for this is one of his early publications in Esperanto that appeared as early as 1893: it was a prayer book, published with the blessings of the Bishop of Reims.[15] However, the *Société française pour la propagation de l'Espéranto*, established in 1898,

8

This starting point and these preliminary observations are shared by the most renowned researchers of the Esperanto phenomenon. From an anthropological and, so to speak, ethnographic perspective, see Guilherme Fians, *Esperanto Revolutionaries and Geeks: Language Politics, Digital Media and the Making of an International Community* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021). From a sociolinguistic perspective see Sabine Fiedler and Cyril Robert Brosch, *Esperanto: Lingua Franca and Language Community* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2022). Both perspectives are complementary to the one proposed in this paper. We intentionally leave out of the discussion the subgroup of Esperanto family speakers, the Esperanto *denaskuloj*, as they did not contribute as a distinct subgroup to the Esperanto collective identity, except for the fact that they serve as tangible proof that Esperanto is a full-fledged human language.

9

I follow the comparative approach for investigating the relevance of "culture" in cultural nationalism to frame Esperanto in a larger context, proposed by Joep Lerssen, "Nationalism and the cultivation of culture," *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 4 (2006): 559–78.

10

The word "Esperanto" means "the one who hopes," and at first it indicated the pseudonym of Zamenhof as the author of the language, not the language itself.

11

A terminological clarification may be useful here: the "Esperanto phenomenon" indicates all cultural aspects surrounding the language, while "Esperanto community of practice" indicates the practice of the language that actually produces its cultural aspects, Finally, "Esperanto Movement" indicates the ideological aspects of the community of practice. The latter term comes from the classic sociological inquiry by Peter G. Forster, *The Esperanto Movement* (The Hague: Mouton, 1982).

12

Zamenhof reserved his attention to the solution of the Jewish question thanks to/due to his religious project, Hillelism, which will be presented in the next section.

13

The letter was published under the title "L. N. Tolstoj kaj Esperanto," *La Esperantisto* 7(1894): 99–100. At the time there was a heated debate about the structure of Esperanto among the first generation of Esperantists, who were mostly Russian. Most probably, Tolstoy's authority influenced Esperantists in doubt that Esperanto did not need structural reforms, rather staying loyal to Zamenhof's project, as the referendum among the readers of the monthly review conducted a few months later would attest. Most probably, Tolstoy's later paper on religion "Prudento aŭ Kredo?" [Common sense or belief?], *La Esperantisto* 2 (1895): 28–30 was the cause of the ban by Tsarist censors on publishing *La Esperantisto* in Russia. All issues reprinted in *La Esperantisto: Gazeto por la amikoj de la lingvo Esperanto*, postface by Reinhard Haupenthal (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1988).

was set up not on religious grounds but on national grounds; eventually, de Beaufront's society evolved into *Espéranto France*, the association representing Esperantists in France.[16] The importance of de Beaufront should not be underestimated: he established the basis of what became the standard way to frame the Esperanto identity: a secondary identity alongside the national one. For this reason, unless they strongly identify themselves with left-wing ideologies such as anarchism, Esperanto speakers in general refer to themselves as French Esperantists, German Esperantists, and so on. The mainstream Esperanto Movement is defined along the lines of so-called "country associations," but note that some of these associations do not represent a sovereign state, examples being Esperanto associations in Catalonia and Scotland.

If it was clear from the start that Esperanto never pertained to a single nation, the relation between nationhood and the Esperanto collective identity was nonetheless already ambiguous in Zamenhof's public speeches. One of them addressed the external world in particular, meaning the non-Esperantists. From the outside, the role of Esperanto was always quite clear, in Zamenhof's words. In particular, the public speech delivered at Guildhall in London on 12th August 1907 addresses nationhood explicitly. Zamenhof solemnly declared:

> "The second attack that we often received as that we Esperantists are bad patriots. As those Esperantists who treat Esperantism as an idea, preaches reciprocal justice and brotherhood between the peoples, and as in the opinion of national chauvinists (*gentaj ŝovinistoj*) patriotism consists of hating everything that is not ours, for that reason, according to them, we are bad patriots; they say we do not love our country (*patrujon*). Against this ignoble lie and calumnious attack, we protest with all our energy, with every fibre of our heart! While pseudo-patriotism, that is, national chauvinism, is part of that common hate, which destroys everything in the world, the genuine patriotism is part of that large worldwide love, that constructs everything, preserves, and makes all happy. Esperantism, which preaches love, and patriotism, which also preaches love, can never be enemies."[17]

From the beginning of the Esperanto Movement, internationalism was literally presented as inter-nationalism: the ideological frame in which Esperanto relies on is found in between imagined nationalism for in-group identity and cosmopolitanism for the external relations, so to avoid excesses in the name of exceptionalism.

On the other side, Zamenhof's wording addressing Esperanto pioneers was of a different tenor. The internal definition of the collective identity of the community of practice brings potential clashes with the Esperanto idea just mentioned of being situated between nations. The foundational myth of Esperantism in an institutional sense[18] is the first World Esperanto Congress in Boulogne-sur-Mer, 1905, whose rituals are repeated every year in July–August, when speakers of the language gather for one week from all over the world.[19] On 9th August 1905, Esperanto delegates signed the Boulogne Declaration, which lays out the core of Esperantism, defined as (author's translation) "the effort to spread the usage of a human neutral language throughout the world," the latter being identified with Esperanto, which is nobody's property. Moreover, the Declaration defines an Esperantist as "any person using Esperanto

14
Brigid O'Keefe, *Esperanto and Languages of Internationalism in Revolutionary Russia* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

15
In Esperanto cultural history, de Beaufront was known as *judaso*, referring to Judas Iscariot, as he left Esperanto for Ido, a reform influenced by French that enjoyed a certain following by scientists and scholars for a few years, as told by Michael Gordin, *Scientific Babel: How Science was Done Before and After Global English* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015). Following the analogy of traitor and betrayed, Zamenhof should be then playing the role of Jesus. Russian Esperantist Korzhenkov, well known in the community for his biography of Zamenhof, wrote a newspaper article on de Beaufront with his main biographic points: Aleksander Korĵenkov, "Louis de Beaufront, la dua patro de Esperanto," *La Ondo de Esperanto* (February 2015).

16
From a linguistic point of view, it is interesting that in classic Esperanto (from the First World War to the Second one, included: 1905–1945) such associations were called *naciaj societoj* "national societies"; in modern Esperanto (from the aftermath of the Second World War until the end of the Cold War: 1945–1991) they started being called *landaj asocioj* "country associations."

17
Johannes Dietterle, ed., *Originala Verkaro de L. L. Zamenhof* (Leipzig: Ferdinand Hirt & Sohn), 382–83.

18
Here, I follow the conceptualisation of mythopoesis as institutional, if not political, legitimation, as framed by Samuel Bennett, "Mythopoetic legitimation and recontextualisation of Europe's foundational myth," *Journal of Language and Politics* 21, no. 2 (2022): 370–89.

19
World Esperanto Congresses did not take place during the World Wars for obvious reasons. In 1967 the event was moved from Tel Aviv to Rotterdam due to the conflict between Israel and the surrounding Arab states in June. Due to the Covid pandemic, in the years 2020 and 2021 it was substituted by Virtual Esperanto Congresses. The World Esperanto Congress 2022 in Montreal, Canada, was number 107.

whatever the goal of its use."[20] But what if someone uses Esperanto for the sake of national chauvinism, to use Zamenhof's expression? This brings Esperantism to a paradox that eventually leads to a short circuit if we read the first words by Zamenhof from his solemn speech delivered at the same venue:

> "In the small town on the French seaside, individuals have come together from the most diverse countries and nations, and they meet each other not mute and deaf, but they understand one another; they speak with each other as brothers, as members of a single nation."[21]

Zamenhof's ambiguity is to frame Esperantists as a cultural community building up its own tradition, as if they were an ethnic group, while by definition Esperantists want to transcend ethnic differences.

If the Esperanto collective is a (sort of) nation, how does it position itself in relation to the other nations? Over time, Esperanto intellectuals gave different answers to this question. At one extreme, there is Eŭgeno Lanti's ideology of *sennaciismo*, anationalism: nation-states are treated as the enemy, and ultimately Esperantism should destroy them. In particular, this view was developed by the members of the *Sennacieca Asocio Tutmonda*, literally "Anationalistic Association Worldwide" (SAT), starting from Lanti himself, the founder of SAT.[22] Lanti interpreted the political role of Esperanto as a tool to attack the very existence of nation-states for the sake of the world revolution led by the working class. Esperantists belonging to the working class, he argues in his writings, should frame Esperanto as "the Latin of the Proletarians": my brother is not my compatriot, with whom I share a national language, but my fellow worker in a factory, with whom I share Esperanto. After his death in 1947, however, SAT framed its ideology to include "preservation of people's languages and cultures as part of the fight for a new social order," not without lively internal discussions.[23]

At the other extreme, Esperanto should be purely an auxiliary language, never impinging upon the internal affairs of nation-states, in a sort of linguistic version of the principle of subsidiarity,[24] where Esperanto comes to the fore only when nation-states do not suffice in managing language issues. This policy of non-intervention became mainstream Esperanto ideology, identified with "neutralism," and by the end accepted any kind of compromise with clearly chauvinistic political regimes such as Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany, up to the point when Esperanto was forbidden or declared *lingua non grata*.[25]

For the purposes of this paper, it is important to note that the relation between Esperanto and nationhood was taken into account explicitly by Zamenhof and the pioneers both in the discourses aimed at non-Esperantists and in the internal definition of the ideological standpoints that, in one way or the other, situate the Esperanto phenomenon within the world. In the next sections, we will see how the religious dimensions of Esperanto were treated less openly in the same, crucial years.

3. Jewish and Catholic dimensions in the early Esperanto Movement

In his *Unua Libro*, the First Book, Zamenhof illustrated his language project with some illustrative texts: the first of these was entitled *Patro nia*, which is the translation of the (Christian) Lord's Prayer, while the second one was entitled *El la Biblio*, from the Bible, specifically, the first chapter of Genesis,

20
The opening speech in Boulogne-sur-Mer is in Dietterle, *Originala Verkaro*, 350–65.

21
Dietterle, *Originala Verkaro*, 361.

22
Comprehensive accounts concerning Lanti are only in Esperanto; see Eŭgeno Lanti, *El verkoj de E. Lanti* (Laroque Timbaut: Brošurservo de S.A.T. ĉe Cercle Espérantiste de l'Agenais, 1982). Eduard Borsboom, *Vivo de Lanti* (Paris: Sennacieca Asocio Tutmonda, 1976). The more the mainstream Esperanto Movement flirted with totalitarian regimes led by Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco, the more anationalistic Esperanto grew, until the tragic events of World War II, where Esperantists were persecuted, including by left-wing inspired regimes, such as Stalin's. See Ulrich Lins, *Dangerous Language: Esperanto and the Decline of Stalinism* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). Discussions about ideological positioning vis-à-vis nationalism still appeared in the last years of the Cold War, then they mostly faded out. For a late-coming comprehensive internal view of a-nationalism: Simon Aarse, *Naciismo kaj esperantismo* (Laroque Timbaut: Brošurservo de S.A.T. ĉe Cercle Espérantiste de l'Agenais, 1981).

23
Quoted from the SAT Congress of 1978 in Lectoure, France. In the 1980s, a specific *Sennaciista Frakcio*, literally "A-nationalist Fraction," tried to revitalise Lanti's *sennaciismo*, a-nationalism, without much success. The Fraction remained dormant in the 1990s. In the SAT Congress of 2001 in Nagykanizsa, Hungary, Esperanto a-nationalism attacked the defense of language minorities as based on ethnicism and micro-nationalism, to be rejected as part of the New Right. Debates can be found in the official SAT bulletin *Sennaciulo*.

24
The principle of subsidiarity is the foundation of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church in its classic definition by Pope Pius XI in the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931.

25
For an account of the mainstream Esperanto Movement vis-à-vis nation-states and its transformations see Federico Gobbo, "Beyond the Nation-State? The ideology of the Esperanto Movement between Neutralism and Multilingualism," *Social Inclusion* 5, no. 4 (2017): 38–47. The story of impossible compromise between the Universal Esperanto Association and the Nazi regime in the World Esperanto Congress in 1933 is told by Ziko van Dijk, *Historio de UEA* (Bratislava: Eldonejo Espero, 2012) which gives an account of the whole history of the association. For the situation of Esperanto in Italy under Mussolini's regime, see Carlo Minnaja, *L'esperanto in Italia: Alla ricerca della democrazia linguistica* (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2007).

which narrates God's creation. Zamenhof's religious point of departure is his Jewishness. In the first version of his "audacious attempt to craft a revisionary Jewish covenant for modernity," to use Esther Schor's words to describe Zamenhof's Hillelism, published in Russian in 1901 as a pamphlet, under the pseudonym Gomo Sum, he explains his view of the Jewish question (Schor's German translation from Zamenhof's Russian):

> "We are simply chained to a cadaver. The regional-racial form of the Jewish religion now is not only a philosophical-religious absurdity, but also the fullest possible anachronism: and until such time as this form will exist, the suffering of the Jews will never, never cease, neither because of [ethnic] liberalism, nor because of Zionism, and after one hundred and after one thousand years, will Heine's prophetic words still pertain with the same strength: Judaism is not a religion it is a misfortune."[26]

The only way to solve the Jewish question, in Zamenhof's own words, was "to create in Judaism a normal sect and strive to ensure that this sect come into being, in the course of time—say, in 100 or 150 years—to include the whole Jewish people."[27] His model for Hillelism was the early history of Christianity, which started as a small sect before becoming a worldwide phenomenon. In a private letter to Kofman, one of the readers of the brochure Gomo Sum, dated 15th May 1901, he clarifies the relation between Hillelism and Esperantism:

> "As long as Jews don't have a language and are obliged in their practice to play the role of "Russians" or "Poles" and so on—they will always have a stigma, and the Jewish question will never be solved. However, do not worry that the project of Hillelism with a neutral language will be dangerous for Esperanto! [. . .] As Hillelism cannot exist without a neutral language, the idea of a neutral language will never be really in place without Hillelism! An international language will fortify itself forever only provided that a group exists that accepts it as a family language, as heritage. A hundred such persons (*homoj*) are for the idea of neutral language much more important than a million other persons. A heritage language of the smallest and most insignificant little people (*popoleto*) has a life much more guaranteed and inextinguishable than a language without a people, even one used by millions of individuals. Yes, I am deeply convinced that, neither the solution of the Jewish question nor the grounding of a neutral language is even possible without Hillelism, that is, without a creation of a neutral people."

Such radical ideas were welcomed neither by Russian Jewish Esperantists nor by Esperanto pioneers in other countries, who in many cases were Christians.

It should not come as a surprise that the Jewish elements in Zamenhof's thinking did not enter Esperantism, at least not directly. In the so-called *belle époque* (which, for the purposes of Esperanto history, should be considered: 1887–1914), it was Christianity more than Judaism that was the Esperantists' religion of reference. It is not by chance that the oldest periodical in Esperanto still published today, on a monthly basis, without substantial interruptions, is *Espero Katolika*, Catholic Hope, whose first

26
For an analysis of Zamenhof's Hillelism at first and then Homaranism, in comparison with other conceptions of Judaism, in particular Reform Rabbi Eugene Borowitz's, refer to Esther Schor (personal communication). A critical edition of Zamenhof's pamphlet *Gillelizm': proekt' rieseniia evreiskago voprosa*, 1901, is edited by Adolf Holzhaus, bilingually Russian and Esperanto, published in 1962.

27
The only source directly in English of Zamenhof's thinking is an interview by Isidore Harris entitled "Esperanto and Jewish ideals," *Jewish Chronicle,* September 6, 1907, 16–18.

issue appeared as early as 1903. Many Esperanto pioneers, like de Beaufront, were fervent Catholics. In 1906, a year after the first World Esperanto Congress, Zamenhof published a second version of Hillelism, this time in Esperanto, in which he writes the rules of Hillelist conduct in the form of dogmas. Of particular interest here is Dogma 11, which states, in the opening:

> "When a Hillelist temple is founded in my city, I must visit it as often as I can, so as to come together there as brothers with Hillelists from other religions and elaborate together with them neutrally human (*neŭtrale-homajn*) customs and festivities and thus contribute to the step-by-step elaboration of a philosophically pure, but at the same time beautiful, religion; poetic and warm, it should be commonly human (*komune-homa*), to regulate practical life, such that that parents will be able to transmit to their children without any hypocrisy. . . . This temple should educate the young as fighters for truth, good, justice, and fraternity with any human being."[28]

Hillelism was attacked immediately after the pamphlet's publication, as an attempt to substitute Jesus with Hillel and therefore contesting the validity of Christianity. The *j'accuse* was brought by a prominent figure of the early Esperanto Movement, the Lithuanian Esperanto pioneer Adomas Jakštas, himself a patriot, Catholic priest, and cultural activist in his country.[29] This is the core of his criticism: "even if it may be helpful for people with no previous religious or philosophical principles, [. . .] Hillelism has one goal only—to transform all people and nations into one big "neutrally human" anthill, where no difference exists of any sort." Zamenhof's reply, under the pseudonym Homarano, was published in *Ruslanda Esperantisto* in 1906, but eventually proved to be insufficient for the initiator of Esperanto. In fact, Zamenhof needed seven more years to elaborate what would be the definitive version of his project, now called Homaranismo.[30] In contrast with Hillelism, in Homaranismo the references to Judaism were omitted, taking as the starting point the tradition of humanities starting from Terence's motto *homo sum*—"homarano" literally means "a member of humankind." Any reference to temples, circles, and families speaking a neutral language at home were eliminated: in practice, what remains is a set of precepts and practices for behaviour in the private sphere, more than an established programme for public life. I argue that Zamenhof put himself in line with philosophical interpretations of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that Carlos Fraenkel calls "philosophical religions," from Plato to Averroes and Maimonides, up to Spinoza.[31]

Within the Esperanto ideologies, Lanti's a-nationalism was another source of criticism against Homaranism, even if posthumous:

> "[Homaranism] is only a fantasy by a good-hearted man, a free-thinking religious idealist. . . . The author of Esperanto lacked a clear understanding of the infinite fight that exists, more or less sharply, between social classes. . . . However, his goal is similar to ours. He wanted to unite people in 'a large family circle.' But tolerance on religion, race or nation, and chance of mutual understanding are not enough to eliminate fraternal opposition (*malfrateco*) and obtain justice. And, without justice, it latently hides war. Zamenhof's Homaranism can flourish only under socialist

28
Dietterle, *Originala Verkaro*, 320.

29
Also known as Aleksandras Dambrauskas in Lithuanian, in Esperanto Aleksandro Dombrovski, he was put in exile from Russia in 1889 for five years for refusing to obey the law that all students should pray in Russian in Orthodox churches, even if they are part of a Catholic school. Once back, he eventually became a national hero of Lithuania. For a profile of his many activities as an Esperanto pioneer, see entry "Dambrauskas, Aleksandras," in Geoffrey Sutton, *Concise Encyclopedia of the Original Literature of Esperanto, 1887–2007* (Mondial: New York, 2008).

30
Dietterle, *Originala Verkaro*, 338–43.

31
See the definition of "philosophical religion" in Carlos Fraenkel, *Philosophical Religions from Plato to Spinoza* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5. An alternative framing of Zamenhof's thinking is put forward by Davide Astori, "The seven Noachian precepts between monotheistic religions and human liberties," *Dionysiana* 4, no. 1 (2010).

management."[32]

4. The genesis of Esperanto semi-nationalism

Zamenhof wanted to inspire Esperantists in his public speech at the first World Esperanto Congress in Boulogne-sur-Mer in 1905, which is the foundational myth of the Esperanto collective identity, presenting the sibling project of Hillelism. However, under the pressure of the local organising committee, he did not make any direct reference to Hillel the Elder, the first-century rabbi whom Zamenhof took as the religious reference for naming his project Hillelism. French Esperantists were worried that Esperantism could be considered a Jewish project, as public opinion in France in 1905 was divided between pro-Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards. For this reason, Zamenhof reluctantly agreed to downplay the religious dimension of his speech. This does not mean that a strong sense of the sacred is not present there: Zamenhof's speech ends with the prayer under the Green Flag, a tradition that was inaugurated in precisely that moment. These are the words he used to introduce the prayer:

> "But so as I am, in this moment, not a member of a nation, but a simple human being, likewise I feel that in this moment I do not belong to a national or party religion of any sort, but I am only a human being [reference to Terence's motto *homo sum*]. And in the present moment before my soul's eyes all that appears is that high moral Force that lives in the heart of any human being, and it is to this unknown Force that I turn with my prayer."

The prayer refers to an unknown or mysterious Force that blesses the Esperanto collective as a sign of good, love, and truth, in their mission to make the walls between the people fall. Only the last stanza was omitted, where Zamenhof clearly invokes religious peace (author's non-poetic translation): "let brothers unite, people shake hands, going forward with peaceful weapons! Christians, Hebrews, and Muslims, we all are God's children."[33] Eventually, another original poem by Zamenhof, *La Espero* ("The Hope"), written in 1893, became a quasi-national anthem of Esperantists.[34] The Hope, is sung at the opening and closing of every World Esperanto Congress since 1905, to the score by Félicien Menu de Ménil, a French pioneer of Esperanto, originally a baron from Flanders. Not surprisingly, the music is vaguely reminiscent of La Marseillaise. This is the poetic translation by Janet Caw of the first stanza:[35]

> "To the world has come a strange new glory,
> Through the world a mighty voice is crying:
> On the wings of every breeze the story
> Now from place to place is swiftly flying."

The "every breeze" (*facila vento*, which became an idiom in Esperanto) is a typical Romantic metaphor of new ideas that spread upwards; the opening words in the Manifesto of the Communist Party, "a spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism," are structurally similar.[36] This is the second stanza:

> "Not with thirsty sword for blood
> It would draw earth's family together:
> To a world towards war for aye aspiring
> It will bring a holy peace forever."

32
Lanti wrote his fundamental pamphlet already in February 1922, after the sending of the letter and the report by the Under-Secretary-General of the League Of Nation, Inazo Nitobe, in January 1922. For details, see Federico Gobbo, "Linguistic Justice, van Parijs, and Esperanto," *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, European and Regional Studies* 9, no. 1 (2016): 55–61. Inazo Nitobe wrote the report once back from the Thirteen Universal Esperanto Congress in Prague, held in Prague in August 1921, in which he pledged for the teaching of Esperanto in public schools worldwide. For details, see Eŭgeno Lanti, *For la Neŭtralismon!* (Leipzig: Sennacieca Asocio Tutmonda, 1923).

33
Dietterle, *Originala Verkaro*, 586–87.

34
Interestingly, the national anthem of Israel is also called "The Hope." A comparison of the two texts would lead us beyond the scope of this paper.

35
In Paul Gubbins, ed., *Star in a Night Sky: An Anthology of Esperanto Literature* (London: Francis Boutle, 2012), 41.

36
Both Zamenhof and Karl Marx were Jews. Persecutions of Esperantists were also linked to Zamenhof's origin; see Lins, *Dangerous Language*. For a broader view on the ideological base that justified persecutions, see Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2018).

The idea of "holy peace" (*sanktan harmonion*) resonates with the idea of French Esperanto intellectuals in the early years of the 20th century that nation-states will create a system that will foster Kant's "Everlasting Peace"; therefore, Esperanto, aspiring to become the main medium for international diplomacy, will be the "language of peace."[37] The Esperanto sense of belonging is a recognition of human fraternity as the ultimate horizon: no war can be justified on the basis of one nation's alleged superiority among others.[38] The following stanza illustrates the Green Flag, la Verda Flago, as the vessel of the "single neutral tongue":

> " 'Neath the sacred sign of Hope's fair banner
> Here are gathered hosts for peaceful fighting:
> And the cause will grow in wondrous manner,
> Hope and labour hand in hand uniting:
>
> Strongly stand those age-old walls which sever
> All the peoples fiercely rent asunder:
> But the stubborn walls will fall for ever,
> By Love's holy passion beaten under.
>
> On a single neutral tongue foundation,
> Understanding ev'ry race the other,
> All the tribes of earth shall make one nation,
> And no longer man shall hate his brother.
>
> So our faithful band will toil and labour
> Will not cease their peaceable endeavour,
> Till the glorious dream—each man a neighbour—
> Realised, shall bless the earth forever."

Esperantists are the ones who hope (*esperantoj*), described as "hosts for peaceful fighting" (*pacaj batalantoj*) that will eventually break the walls that divide "the tribes" (*popoloj*[39]) in their "peaceable endeavour" (*laboro paca*). Paradoxically, a register apt for war is used to foster peace. Also paradoxically, Esperantists should unite the nationalities under the Green Flag, representing the neutral tongue foundation (*neŭtrala lingva fundamento*), constituting what I propose here calling "semi-nationalism." Unlike Romantic programmes for national uprisings that took place in Europe a few decades before, Esperanto lacks the second step of nation-building: there is no political programme to find a land—and, therefore, form a state—for an ethnically defined people. This second aspect was never taken up seriously in the Esperanto agenda.[40]

To sum up, in the formation of the collective identity in those crucial early years of the 20th century, elements from European nationalism were borrowed; in particular, we can see a tension between elements from Romanticism, such as the common destiny of Esperantists in unifying the world nations in peace, and classic Enlightenment, echoing Renan's voluntarism in nations, as being an Esperantist is an act of will, a conscious choice. On the other hand, the Jewish dimension in the foundation of Esperantism as a collective effort was hidden with care, safe from prying eyes. This explains why Esther Schor characterised the history of Esperanto as "a series of Chinese boxes with a Jewish ghost inside."[41] To summarise, I argue that the blessing of the Green Star strengthens the idea of Esperantism as a peculiar version of semi-nationalism: non-ethnic

37
Not by chance, in his bilingual "appeal to the diplomatists" of 1915, echoing Mazzini and Victor Hugo, Zamenhof advocated for the "United States of Europe," and many Esperanto pioneers in the belle époque were also pacifists.

38
See chapter "Beyond the nation-state?" in the book by Leerssen mentioned earlier.

39
Zamenhof did not use the word "race," a concept he fiercely rejected. See his talk in the Congress of Races of July 1911 in London, reproduced as Treaty 12 in Dietterle, *Originala Verkaro*, 345–53.

40
In Hroch's model of the three phases of nationalism, Esperanto fulfills Phase A, which is self-identification as a culture of its own, while it lacks Phases B and C. See the critical view of Hroch's model in Leerssen, "Nationalism and the cultivation of culture."

41
This expression is due to Esther Schor, quoted in Federico Gobbo, *Interlinguïstiek, een vak voor meertaligheid. Interlingvistiko, fako por multlingveco. Interlinguistics, a discipline for multilingualism* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015).

Charles A. Sheehan, *Amikajn salutojn*. Postcard ([London]: Raphael Tuck & Sons,1909). Vienna, Esperanto Museum.

but civic, not political but cultural.

The fact that pioneers of Esperanto consider the language holy is also testified by the personification of Goddess Hope in postcards like "Friendly greetings" (*Amikajn salutojn*) and other iconic representations of the Esperanto Movement during the *belle époque*.

5. Other religious dimensions of Esperanto

After Zamenhof's passing in 1917, a few months before the October Revolution in his fatherland, his influence started to fade, slowly but steadily.[42] Despite the atrocities of World War 1, the Esperanto Movement succeeded in surviving and organising itself. Some figures of "cultural saints" started to emerge on the Esperanto landscape, quite often idolised posthumously, and in connection with some religion.[43] I will give only two examples: Lidia Zamenhof and András Cseh.

Lidia Zamenhof was one of Ludwik Lejzer's daughters, and, unlike her brothers and sister, she took the spiritual heritage of her father upon her shoulders. In 1921 she founded, together with other Zamenhof family members and close friends, an Esperanto circle in Warsaw, called Konkordo.[44] In 1925, Lidia was invited by Martha Root, an Esperantist whom she did not know, to give a talk about the points in common between his father's Homaranism and the principles of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í faith. This invitation changed her life: Lidia abandoned atheism to embrace the Bahá'í faith. In fact, among the other principles, the Bahá'í faith calls for the adoption of an international auxiliary language, "thus will the earth be regarded as one country and one home" (from Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet Ishráqát).[45] She started teaching Esperanto abroad not for the sake of Esperanto but for the sake of the Bahá'í faith, as Lanti was doing for anationalism in the same years. This is a trait shared with a number Esperanto cultural saints: the language Zamenhof initiated is part of a larger picture for the regeneration of humanity. After the concessions made to the Nazis by the Universal Esperanto Association to try to save Esperanto in Germany, and the consequent schism in 1936–1937, Lidia fiercely denounced cowardice and flew to the United States. When she returned

42
It is only in the last years that historians have underlined the imperial Russian origins of Zamenhof as an essential frame for understanding the Esperanto phenomenon. See at least: Brigid O'Keeffe, "An International Language for an Empire of Humanity: L. L. Zamenhof and the Imperial Russian Origins of Esperanto," *East European Jewish Affairs* 49, no. 1 (2019): 1–19.

43
For the concept of "cultural saints," I refer to the framing of this concept by Jón Karl Helgason, "The Role of Cultural Saints in European Nation States," in *Cultural Contacts and The Making of Cultures: Papers in Homage to Itamar Even-Zohar*, ed. Rakefet Sela-Sheffy and Gideon Toury (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2011), 245–52.

44
A vivid and informed portrait of Lidia Zamenhof's life is in chapter 7, appropriately entitled "The Priestess," of the book by Esther Schor devoted to the Esperanto history and contemporary life. Esther Schor, *Bridge of Words: Esperanto and the Dream of a Universal Language* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2016).

45
Lidia Zamenhof described her spiritual journey in the magazine *World Order*, December 1938 (vol. 4, issue 9), under the title "How I found my faith." Her de facto official biography is by Wendy Heller, *Lidia: The Life of Lidia Zamenhof, Daughter of Esperanto* (Oxford: G. Ronald, 1985). It was also translated into Esperanto, for the purposes of propagating the Bahá'í faith among Esperantists.

to Europe in September 1942, she was sent from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka and did not survive, becoming a martyr in Esperanto culture. In the words of Esther Schor: "She had intended to give her life for the Bahá'í faith, but died as an Esperantist, a Zamenhof, a Jew."

András Gergely János Cseh was born in 1895 in Marosludas, a Romanian citizen of the Hungarian-speaking minority, who wrote his Czech family name Čech as Cseh according to the Hungarian convention or as Ĉe according to the Esperanto convention. He encountered Esperanto in 1911, became a Catholic priest in 1919, and obtained permission from his bishop to conduct Esperanto courses across Romania and abroad. He developed a natural naturalistic method for learning Esperanto that is known as the "direct method" (*rekta metodo*), similar to the Berlitz method, as his learners came from different linguistic backgrounds. In 1927 he was invited by the Swedish prince Charles to conduct a course in Stockholm, including in the Parliament. After a tour for teaching in Estonia, France, Germany, Latvia, Norway, Poland, and Switzerland, in 1930 he moved to Arnhem in the Netherlands, where he founded what is now the International Esperanto Institute (IEI), together with Julia and Johannes Isbrücker. They opened the *Arnhems Esperantohuis*, the Arnhnem Esperanto House, which was active until 1944, when a bomb destroyed the building. He lived in the Netherlands until 1979 and became the model of the ideal Esperanto teacher: a person who can teach the language to anybody, regardless of their linguistic repertoires, without books or any technological aids.

Other relevant religious dimensions of Esperanto are in place via the connections with various religions, which give a place of honour to Esperanto; in particular, brief mentions should be given at least to Spiritism and Oomoto, without any pretense of exhaustivity. The French educator Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, already famous for having brought to France the method of Pestalozzi, an Italian pedagogist, to teach mathematics, once had a revelation. After that mystical experience, he published *Le Livre des esprits* (1857) in Paris, The Book of Spirits, which is considered the first book of Spiritism, under the name of Allan Kardec. Kardecism became a religion with views of its own on science and philosophy as well, which was especially popular in Brazil, where Esperantists traced parallels between the figure of Zamenhof and Kardec.[46] Another religious dimension of Esperanto comes via the Japanese new religion Oomoto.[47] Founded in 1892, Oomoto was spiritually guided from 1900 to 1948 by Deguchi Onisaburo, who introduced Esperanto into the religion. The first Oomoto book in Esperanto was published in 1924, and the language is a way to bring Deguchi's revelation to Western culture, starting with Paris. Persecutions against Oomoto and World War II signaled a halt in the Esperanto activity, which was resumed after the war.[48] In his account of Ivo Lapenna, the founder of modern Esperanto Movement (1945–1991) in the aftermath of World War II, the historian Ulrich Lins reports that Lapenna lamented the excessive presence of religious rituals (more than 30) during World Esperanto Congresses.[49] The first sociological study of the Esperanto community of practice was conducted by Tanquist in 1927, where "religious propaganda" was found to be one of the reasons why people learn Esperanto, according to the interviewees.[50] Subsequent sociological inquiries, from the 1980s until the 2000s, clearly show that the modern Esperanto Movement has become secularised, as the presence of religions using Esperanto in Esperanto gatherings becomes less and

46
For a detailed account of the relation between Esperanto and Spiritism, see David Pardue, "Uma só língua, uma só bandeira, um só pastor: Spiritism and Esperanto in Brazil," *Esperantologio/Esperanto Studies* 2 (2001): 11–27.

47
I wish to thank Emil Larsson (Uppsala) for having clarified to me that Oomoto claimed not to originate from Shinto in the aftermath of World War II, when the Shinto Directive came into place (15th December 1945). Unlike Neo-Shinto religions, Oomoto is neither militaristic nor ultra-nationalistic, and never was.

48
For a detailed account, see Nancy K. Stalker, *Prophet Motive: Deguchi Onisaburo, Oomoto, and the Rise of New Religions in Imperial Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

49
A detailed account of the two sides of Ivo Lapenna's Esperanto activity is only in Esperanto. See Ulrich Lins, "La du flankoj de Ivo Lapenna," *Beletra Almanako* no. 19 (2014): 121–37.

50
Tanquist's results are critically scrutinised by Garvía, *Esperanto and its Rivals* (2015).

less relevant.[51]

7. Postmodern Esperanto: the end of ideologies?

After the end of the Cold War, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the advent of mass digitisation thanks to the invention of the World Wide Web, in 1991 the Esperanto Movement entered a period of deep transformation that I call "postmodern Esperanto." The last document with a relevant ideological influence in the Esperanto community is the Prague Manifesto, issued in 1996, for the first time not only in Esperanto but in many languages, from the moment of its publication. That document is entirely secular and frames the Esperanto identity in terms of support for human rights and fostering multilingualism, as a unifying synthesis of previous documents, which went in different directions.[52] Esperanto clearly shows traits of "banal nationalism," as Billing defined it.[53] Let me give two brief examples. In 2015, when the 100th World Esperanto Congress was held in Lille, significatively close to Bologne-sur-Mer, the pseudo-national Esperanto football team played its first match against Western Sahara within the Non-FIFA tournament, reserved to "state-

Eugenio Hansen, *Parolu Esperanton*. Photo-edited image, adapted from *Flower Thrower* of Banksy. Source of the image: Pinterest, accessed 1st November 2023, https://www.pinterest.it/pin/397372367117046431/.

less people." The Worldwide Esperanto Football Association (TEFA) was founded.

As a second example, mixing contemporary art like Banksy's with traditional signs of Esperanto, such as the five-pointed green star that is a synecdoche of the Green Flag became a normal phenomenon, without any ideological load.[54]

Such recent developments demonstrate that, even if Zamenhof's influence has been without any doubt fundamental for Esperanto, from its inception, Esperanto language ideology was shaped not only by Zamenhof

51 See Foster, *The Esperanto Movement* (1985); Irene Caligaris, *Una lingua per tutti, una lingua di nessun Paese: una ricerca sul campo sulle identità esperantiste* (Torino: Aracne, 2016); Fians, *Esperanto Revolutionaries and Geeks*.

52 See Gobbo, "Beyond the Nation-State?".

53 See Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: SAGE Publications, 1995).

54 See also reflections and fieldwork observations by Fians, *Esperanto Revolutionaries and Geeks*.

but also by key figures of the Esperanto Movement. Furthermore, the greater the temporal and cultural distance, the less influence by Zamenhof and the other pioneers.

As concluding remarks, we argue that on the one hand, the Esperanto collective identity can be framed as an "imagined community" in Benedict Andersen's sense. However, the analysis conducted in this paper shows that framing it in terms of nation-building shows evident limitations. Following Hroch's conceptualisation in three phases, phase A, in which the cultural specificity is defined, can be considered a relative success for the solidity of Esperanto as a language, up to the point that banal nationalistic traits can be also found. But in contrast, the political empowerment of the Esperanto Movement was revealed to be scarce, perhaps because its political vindications always remain vague and contradictory, such that the Hroch's phases A and B cannot be really applied easily.[55] For this reason, in the case of Esperanto the term "semi-nationalism" is proposed.

On the other hand, the religious dimensions of Esperanto are very complex, as they have embraced different cultural grounds, depending on the context where the language is practised: in particular, if Judaism and Catholics played a crucial role in the early years, other dimensions entered the arena, such as Bahá'í, Oomoto, and Spiritism. This shows that, without any doubt, Esperanto is far from being ideologically neutral or lacking any cultural background, unlike the prima facie impression that an "interlanguage," to repeat Joshua Fishman's wording mentioned in the introduction, could give. Esperanto is not only an interlanguage, but a much more multi-faceted human phenomenon.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank all the participants of the workshop *Religious Dimensions of Nationalism: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* organised by Marco Pasi, Joep Leerssen, and Francesco Piraino at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia, 26th–28th November 2020. Your observations and encouragement were invaluable.

55 On the relation between the study of national movements and the concept of nationalism in Hroch's model, see the insights in the starred footnote in the foreword to the third edition of Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe*.

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

Gustaf Forsell

Centro Studi
di Civiltà e Spiritualità
Comparate
fondazione
Giorgio Cini onlus

Gustaf Forsell
Department of Theology, Uppsala University
gustaf.forsell@teol.uu.se

Keywords:
Interwar Sweden, National socialism, Race, Nationalism, Esotericism

To cite this:
Forsell, Gustaf. "The Nordic Spirit and Race Psychology: Racial Conceptions of the North in Interwar Swedish National Socialism." *Religiographies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2023): 90–104.

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 (*Nationalsocialistiska 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).[1] A possible venue to avoid potential pitfalls, such as exaggerating the popularised post-war image of the "Nazi Occult"[2] and overemphasising the impact of "border science" (e.g., parapsychology, cosmobiology, and World Ice Theory) on a national socialist worldview,[3] is to nuance historical conflations of esotericism and politics; for instance, to acknowledge that both the far-right and the far-left have engaged with esoteric beliefs and practices.[4] 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."[5]

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."[6] Terje Emberland claims that the driving force of the Norwegian pagan national

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 Word*, 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.

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

socialists was an idealised pan-Germanic utopia comprising every people of the Nordic-Germanic race.[7] 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.[8]

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.[9] 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 conflations 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."[10]

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.[11] By conceptualising race as a notion, and thereby as a "human invention" and a "social construct,"[12] it can be understood as a product of long historical processes preceding race as a biological term.[13] 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.[14]

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.[15] 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 John 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, "Hakkorset och wasakärven: en studie av nationalsocialismen i Sverige 1924–1950," (PhD diss., Gothenburg University, 1990), 250–5; Nathaniël 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: nyhedenskap 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 Religious 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 eugenist." 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).

20
Stefan Arvidsson, *Ariska idoler: den indoeuropeiska mytologin som ideologi och vetenskap* (Stockholm: Symposion, 2000), 55–65.

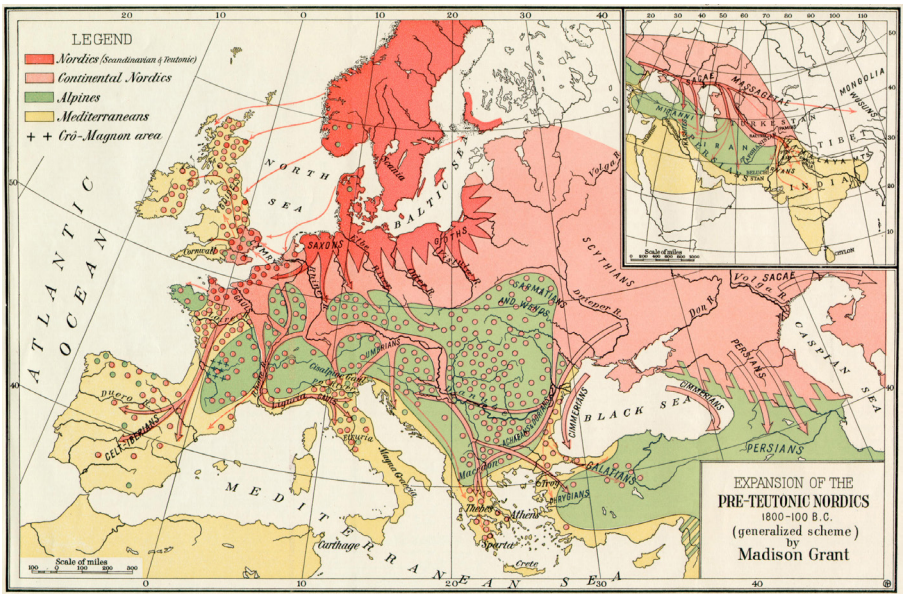
21
Mattias Gardell, "Att sortera människor: rasklassificeringens historia," in *Att mäta rasism*, ed. Edda Manga et al. (Norsborg: Mångkulturellt centrum, 2022), 42–47.

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."[16] 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.[17]

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.[18] 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.[19] 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.[20]

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.[21] 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.[22] 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.[23] 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.[24]

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.[25]

The category of Nordic race was developed based on the theory of Nordicism. In his *Les races et les peoples 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.[26] 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.[27] 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."[28] 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.[29]

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.[30] 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.[31] 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," *Nordeuropaforum* 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 Lutzhöft, *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 rashygien: nutida kultur- och rasfrågor i etisk belysning*, 2nd ed. (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söner, 1922), 16, 152, 157–58.

Herman Lundborg. Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

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.[32]

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.[33] These circumstances were substantiated by national romanticism and Sweden's general openness to German society, politics, and culture in the early twentieth century.[34] 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."[35] 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.[36] A few years later, the society had approximately 300 to 400 members, and its activities lasted until 1944.[37] 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."[38] According to the programme setting the groundwork for the society's operations, an outlined *upplysningsverksamhet* (operation of enlightenment) was to be carried out by using "weapons of the spirit."[39]

The Manhem Society was established within a fragmented Swedish national socialist landscape, characterised throughout the interwar period by internal rivalries, conflicts, and temporary alliances.[40] 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.[41] 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."[42] Prominent members of the party's regional branches expressed similar ideas to the party leader Birger Furugård.[43] Ideological divergences soon became

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.

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."[44]

The SNSP was the only national socialist party in Sweden in the early 1930s with approximately 3,000 members.[45] 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.[46] 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.[47]

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.[48]

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.[49] 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.[50] 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."[51] In light of this, the members of the Manhem Society considered themselves as carrying on the work of the Geatish Society.[52]

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.[53] These objectives, along with Nordicist 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.

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."[54]

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.[55] Accordingly, he construed an alternative trinitarian belief centred on "God All-Father," "the heroic Jesus," and "holy spirit."[56] 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."[57] 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."[58]

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,[59] he suggested in 1931 that Sweden was "the primordial homeland of Nordic-Aryan race."[60] 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[61]—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."[62]

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,"[63] could prove the existence of Atlantis

51
Stiftelseurkund, 17–18.

52
Stiftelseurkund, 10–15; Carl-Ernfrid Carlberg, *Vakna svensk! Till den sovande svenska nationen* (Stockholm: Svea Rike, 1934), 9.

53
[Carlberg], *Mera ljus*, 11.

54
Ibid., 9. "Vi äro icke gudsförnekare. Vi tro på GUD ALLFADER, Valhalls, jordens och världsalltets Skapare, den vise och väldige Ledaren och Ljuskämpen, 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."

55
Carlberg, *Vakna svensk*, 8.

56
[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.

57
[Carlberg], *Mera ljus*, 7–9.

58
[Carlberg], *Mera ljus,* 4.

59
Berggren, *Blodets renhet*, 117.

60
Carl-Ernfrid Carlberg, "Nordiskt rasskydd," *Nationen* 7, no. 3 (February 1931): 1.

61
Stiftelseurkund, 43–44; Uppsala University Library, Emanuel Linderholm's Collection, vol. 5, Carl-Ernfrid Carlberg to Emanuel Linderholm, August 14, 1934.

62
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

and thus explain similarities between civilisations on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.[64] 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,[65] 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.[66] 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."[67]

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 *Urtexte 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."[68] He expressed similar ideas, but without any Ariosophic content, in his texts published in the NSAP's theoretical magazine *Nationell Socialism*.[69] The pastor Nils Hannerz,[70] 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,[71] 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."[72] 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."[73] 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.[74]

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 världsförklaringsteori."

64
Claes Lindsström, *Världsisläran: 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, *Urtexte der ersten göttlichen Offenbarung: Attalantinische 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); Håwe, "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.

(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*).[75] 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 financers in the mid-1930s.[76]

The NSAP declared that it represented a Swedish form of national socialism distinctly unrelated to the one practiced in Germany.[77] That was also the case in the party's formative years.[78] 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."[79]

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.*"[80]

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*,

73
Hannerz, *Den levande gudens ord,* 17–18.

74
Nils Hannerz, *Evangelisk nordisk tro och världsåskådning: Manhemsbetraktelser* (Stockholm: Svea Rike, 1936), 30–31.

75
Birger Furugård and Sven Olov Lindholm, "Samling under Lindholm!", *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* 4, no. 90 (November 1936): 1.

76
Lena Berggren, "Den svenska mellankrigstidsfascismen—ett ointressant marginalfenomen eller ett viktigt forskningsobjekt?", *Historisk tidskrift* 122, no. 3 (September 2002): 412.

77
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.

78
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.

79
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.

80
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.

in which it was repeatedly emphasised that national socialism was an "eternal worldview," the core of which was identified as the "Nordic racial idea."[81] 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.[82] Dahlberg himself claimed that national socialism would be realised when the Swedish people were able to perceive it as an internal necessity.[83]

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.[84] 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."[85] 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."[86] 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.[87]

Henning was influenced by Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss, to whom he frequently referred.[88] 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.[89] Henning put a particular emphasis on Clauss' main work, *Die nordische Seele* (1923), which was published in eighteen editions between 1926 and 1943.[90] 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.[91]

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*.[92] 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.[93]

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.

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.[94] 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.[95] 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.[96] 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.[97]

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).[98] 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.[99]

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.[100] 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.[101] 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.[102]

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.[103] 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.[104] 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."[105]

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

94
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.

95
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.

96
Luccio, "On Prägnanz," 129.

97
Bengt Olov Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," *Nationell Socialism* 1, no. 7 (July 1935): 198.

98
Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," 198.

99
Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," 199–200.

100
Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," 200, 202.

101
Bengt Olov Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," *Meddelanden från Samfundet Manhem* 1, no. 5 (1935): 5.

102
Bengt Olov Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," *Nationell Socialism* 1, no. 7 (July 1935): 201.

103
Bengt Olov Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," *Meddelanden från Samfundet Manhem* 1, no. 14 (1935): 2.

104
Bengt Olov Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," *Meddelanden från Samfundet Manhem* 1, no. 5 (1935): 6.

105
Henning, "Den nordiska rassjälen," 2.

construed by Bengt Olov Henning were expressed by other party ideologues. Per Dahlberg, for instance, considered race as a "physical-psychological totality."[106] 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.[107] 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.[108] In several articles in *Nationen*, one of which was published as a pamphlet and advertised as recommended reading in *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten,*[109] 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."[110] 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."[111] 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.[112]

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.[113] 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.

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; Nathaniël Kunkeler, "The Evolution of Swedish Fascism: Self-Identification and Ideology in Interwar Sweden," *Patterns of Prejudice* 50, no. 4–5 (November 2016): 378–97.

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.

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 Nordicist 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 worldview" 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 conflations of nationalism and esotericism. As stressed by Justine Bakker, race matters in and for esotericism and its study.[114] 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."[115] 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.[116] By doing so, it is possible to understand both the complex yet somewhat marginal interwar conflations 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.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Ernils Larsson, Tomas Poletti Lundström, and Lisa

114 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.

115 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/.

116 Cf. Strube, "Nazism," 344–45.

Bukhave Jensen for their comments on an earlier draft of the text. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewer for his/her critical reading and useful comments.

Funding Details and Disclosure Statement

The author received no specific funding for this work.

Biographical Note

Gustaf Forsell is a PhD candidate in Church History at the Department of Theology and at the Centre for Multidisciplinary Studies on Racism (CEMFOR) at Uppsala University, Sweden, working on a thesis about Christian national socialism in Sweden 1925–1945. His research interests include fascist Christian theology, esoteric fascism, fascist ideas of a Nordic race, intersections of Christianity and esotericism, and the history of racism.

The Imagery of Christian Nationalism in Lebanon

Francesco Mazzucotelli

Centro Studi di Civiltà e Spiritualità Comparate
fondazione Giorgio Cini onlus

Francesco Mazzucotelli
University of Pavia
francesco.mazzucotelli@unipv.it

Keywords:
Lebanon, Lebanese civil war, Lebanese Christians, Religious nationalism, Sectarianism

To cite this:
Mazzucotelli, Francesco. "The Imagery of Christian Nationalism in Lebanon." *Religiographies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2023): 105–121.

Abstract

Lebanese Christian nationalism encompasses a wide spectrum of political discourses and practices that aim at preserving the national identity and the territorial integrity of Lebanon as a quintessentially Christian sovereign country. This essay examines the production and dissemination of images, visual representations, and aesthetic practices that have promoted a Christian nationalist discourse in Lebanon from the early 1970s to the present. Religiously infused images and symbols, taken from Christian textual sources, liturgical and devotional practices, and iconography are powerfully used in narratives that convey the image of Lebanon as part of a Christian faithscape and depict a brave history of resistance. Religious themes and images are also used to legitimize political leaders through the language of sainthood, prophecy, and salvation, in order to create a sense of affective proximity and emotional community between the leaders and their followers. The contrast between disenchantment and moral rebirth, doom and salvation highlights the religious dimensions of politics and the nexus between communal identity, sectarian affiliation, and political mobilization in modern Lebanon.

Introduction

The notion of "Christian nationalism" was proposed by Felsch in an edited volume on the political turmoil that engulfed Lebanon in the wake of the Arab uprisings and the Syrian civil war. He defines Christian nationalism as an ideological layer, more or less overtly expressed, that reformulates the ideas of exceptionalism and isolationism as they were variously articulated in the Lebanese Christian political arena during the twentieth century.[1]

At the core of this discourse, according to Felsch, is an idea of Lebanon as quintessentially a Christian nation. According to this vision, which emerged before the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990), Christians should enjoy a status of political preeminence because of their supposed historical role, even in a country that currently has a Muslim majority. Therefore, Lebanese Christian nationalism seeks to preserve a strong presence of Christians in government and policy-making agencies, a significant degree of self-government for Christian religious institutions, and even a clear territorial demarcation of Christian-majority areas within the country.

In many ways, this discourse is a metamorphosis of the *discours libaniste* that Sassine analyzed in his research.[2] This Lebanese national narrative was conceived mainly in Christian (and more specifically Maronite) milieus, for the sake of Christian political and economic interests and agendas, and was articulated through tropes and themes that were mostly based on Maronite tradition and Biblical references.[3]

Bawardi shows in his work how the "Lebanist" nationalist discourse, then seen through the prism of the supposed continuity between modern Lebanon and its ancient Phoenician past,[4] was developed under the French Mandate (1920–1943) and after the independence as a cultural project

1
Maximilian Felsch, "The Rise of Christian Nationalism in Lebanon," in *Lebanon and the Arab Uprisings: In the Eye of the Hurricane*, ed. Maximilian Felsch and Martin Wählisch (New York: Routledge, 2016), 70–86.

2
Fares Sassine, "Le libanisme maronite. Contributions à l'étude d'un discours politique" (PhD diss., Université de Paris Sorbonne, 1979).

3
Carol Hakim, *The Origins of the Lebanese National Idea: 1840–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

4
Francesco Mazzucotelli, "On the Shores of Phoenicia: Phoenicianism, Political Maronitism, and Christian Nationalism in Lebanon," in *Histories of Nationalism beyond Europe: Myths, Elitism and Transnational Connections*, ed. Jan Záhořík and Antonio M. Morone (Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 53–71.

that used multiple tools, including history textbooks, archaeological sites and museums, poetry and literature, art festivals, music, and movies.[5] This production amounted to an attempt at constructing cultural hegemony within the Lebanese context. The project was manifestly political in content and vocation because it wanted to consolidate the Lebanese nation-state and its identity, constructed around its imagined Phoenician and Christian roots.

In this essay, I am concerned with the production and dissemination of images, iconography, aesthetic practices, and visual representations that have promoted a Christian nationalist discourse in Lebanon from the early 1970s to the present. From a methodological and theoretical point of view, I refer to the considerations advanced by Maasri about the intersection between visuality, art, design, and politics in the specific historical and political context of Lebanon before and after the civil war (1975–1990).[6] Posters, leaflets, flyers, photographs, statues, and later on images in jpeg and gif format contain symbolic codes and cultural meanings, incite reactions, command power, and call on onlookers to act as political subjects.

Political images are part of the process of propaganda, which is meant to manufacture consent, shape perceptions and behaviors, and instigate change in the target audience, but they also are symbolic sites of struggle. In the everyday dimension of contentious politics, politically committed art played and continues to play a powerful role as a vector of meanings. Yet, the aesthetic vocabulary and the practices of political images in Lebanon do not constitute a unified typology. This means that the analysis of signs, texts, visual effects, and aesthetic materializations cannot be disentangled from the political discourse and the historical context in which each image was produced.

The production of political images in Lebanon has been stimulated by the intense artistic and literary production, intellectual fervor, and radical political activism that have flourished in Beirut since the 1960s, drawing inspiration from graphic design, transnational modernism, Socialist realism, and traditional religious iconography. Even if the bulk of this production was located in the Palestinian and leftist milieus of West Beirut, a considerable spillover was also seen in the Christian-majority areas.[7]

The ephemeral nature of posters, leaflets, banners and, later on, blogs and websites, poses a significant problem, as does the massive destruction brought by conflicts and the deliberate destruction of artifacts that were deemed excessively sensitive or not worthy of preservation. Maasri explains how she managed to collect some five hundred posters from the civil war period and turn them into a digital database, with the intention to make it accessible through customized searches to "provide insightful research material for other interested scholars and students."[8]

From this perspective, I treat the posters and images that were digitalized, uploaded, and made available on the *Signs of Conflict* website as primary sources, and look through these primary sources at the production of meanings, and at how they are performed in public spaces.

I first provide a historical and theoretical introduction to the concept of Christian nationalism in Lebanon and its correlation with sectarianism as both an institutionalized political system and a political culture.

I then intend to show how the use of religious images and vocabulary establishes a nexus between territory and history that is invoked to perorate Lebanese independence and its mission as the fortress of Christianity in the Holy Land of the divine revelation, where Jesus Christ lived

5
Basilius Bawardi, *The Lebanese–Phoenician Nationalist Movement: Literature, Language and Identity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016).

6
Zeina Maasri, *Cosmopolitan Radicalism: The Visual Politics of Beirut's Global Sixties* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

7
Zeina Maasri, *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 46–52.

8
Maasri, *Off the Wall*, xxiv. Maasri, *Cosmopolitan Radicalism*, 23.

and preached. In this way, the land of Lebanon is conceptualized as part of a faithscape and a sacred geography, and its turbulent past is reinvented as a brave history of religious resistance. I intend to point out how this teleological interpretation of history is invoked to reinforce the continuity between past and present, and the connection to the land.

I then proceed to show how religious themes are invoked to legitimize political leaders, providing them with an aura of devotion, mysticism, and even prophetic qualities that reinforce the affective proximity and the emotional closeness between the leader and his followers. In the Lebanese Christian context considered in this essay, this connection between leaders and followers is often predicated on a strong anti-elitist discourse, and aims at consolidating the perception of an emotional community.

I also intend to explain how images, words, and references taken from the local religious traditions, even in their more vernacular forms, prompt a strong sense of victimhood and martyrdom, with repercussions on the cycles of selective memory, amnesia, violence, and repression that have been examined in the Lebanese post-conflict context after the end of the civil war (1975–1990).[9] In this framework, I show how the contrast between disenchantment and moral rebirth, as well as doom and salvation, highlights the religious dimensions of politics and the nexus between communal identity, sectarian affiliation, and political mobilization in modern Lebanon.[10]

9
Saree Makdisi, "Beirut, a City without History?", in *Memory and Violence in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Ussama Makdisi and Paul Silverstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 201–14.

10
In this article, I use the most common simplified transliteration for names of individuals and places, and a scientific transliteration based on DIN 31635 for political terms and concepts.

Christian Nationalism and Sectarianism in Lebanon

Lebanon's current political system is based on the 1926 Constitution and the 1943 National Pact, the latter a trans-sectarian gentlemen's agreement that promoted the interests of a rapidly developing financial and commercial bourgeoisie, mostly based in the capital city, Beirut.[11] This pact balanced the need for a political compromise among the country's bourgeois and land-owning elites with the need to preserve Lebanon's nature vis-à-vis the Arab world and its anti-colonial experience.[12]

On the one hand, the pact created a consociational and clientelist system based on a power-sharing formula that fed reciprocal vetoes and ultimately resulted in fragile state institutions. On the other hand, the pact did not reduce the aspirations of pan-Arab nationalists towards a rapprochement between Lebanon and the other member countries of the Arab League, nor did it ease the anxiety of many Christians (in particular Maronites) who were scared by the prospect of an assimilation into an Arab-Islamic environment. Some of them clung to the claim that Lebanon was the "national homeland of the Christians in the Middle East."[13]

This idea expanded the thesis, initially endorsed by Henri Lammens, known as *asile du Liban*, which saw the country as the mountain refuge of persecuted religious minorities through the centuries. Such a theory provided a teleological interpretation of history and a perspective of manifest destiny that was claimed by the advocates of Lebanese peculiarity versus the rest of the Middle East.[14]

The 1960s saw the rise of a new radical Left, characterized by the intersection of Marxism, Maoism, Third-Worldism, and militant support for Palestinian national rights. This triggered a radicalization of the Lebanese Christian political field, at first with the formation of the coalition of right-wing parties known as the "Tripartite Alliance" in 1968, and later with the call for a partition or a division of the country along sectarian

11
Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 93–95.

12
Marie-Christine Aulas, "The Socio-Ideological Development of the Maronite Community: The Emergence of the Phalanges and the Lebanese Forces," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (1985): 1–27.

13
Elaine Hagopian, "Maronite Hegemony to Maronite Militancy: The Creation and Disintegration of Lebanon," *Third World Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1989): 101–17.

14
Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 134–35.

lines, aimed at a homogeneous Christian territorial polity, either in the form of an autonomous canton or as a wholly independent state.[15]

The Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik, founded in 1938 by the monastic Lebanese Maronite Order, was the beacon of a militant current of thought that blended and expanded many pre-existing themes of Christian isolationism and steered them in a strongly sectarian direction, emphasizing the (alleged) Marxist and Islamic threat.[16] This milieu provided intellectual legitimization to the Christian (Maronite in particular) supremacist political groups that eventually morphed into the right-wing Lebanese Front at the onset of the Lebanese civil war.[17]

The discourse of Maronite leader Bashir al-Jumayyil was predicated on the idea of a Christian identity threatened by Arab nationalism, militant Islamism, and Marxism (or a combination of the three). This idea was coupled with slogans and catchphrases about resilience and perseverance against perceived threats of submission and erasure. According to Thuselt,[18] this discourse marked the transition of a vast sector of the Maronite constituency from a self-perception as the vanguard of modernity, and the elite of the Lebanese nation-state, towards a self-perception as an ethnic minority under constant threat of annihilation.[19] In this context, according to Felsch, Lebanese nationalism became synonymous with the protection of Lebanon's Christians against Arab nationalism, Islam disguised as Arabism, and Third-Worldism.[20]

As Haddad argued, it is difficult to disentangle nationalist from sectarianist discourses in the modern Middle East.[21] On the one hand, sectarian discourses need to be understood in the frame of the nation-state paradigm and the imagination of volatile national identities. On the other hand, the problematization of the relationship between sectarian identities and nationalism questions the notion of the artificiality of the nation-state in the Middle East and the conceptualization of nationalism as a wholly imported political theory.

The nature of sectarianism is among the most discussed topics in Lebanese politics and contemporary history. At its most elementary level, sectarianism in Lebanon can be defined as a system of power-sharing along confessional lines, predicated on formal and informal arrangements. This includes, but is not limited to, the allocation of parliamentary seats, the formation of cabinets, and the appointments in the higher ranks of the public administration according to predetermined quotas set for each of the eighteen officially recognized religious groups.

In fact, recent academic debates on sectarianism have problematized the concept and highlighted how this emotionally charged term, often used in petty polemics, needs to be carefully contextualized in time and space.[22] Since the groundbreaking work of Makdisi, who theorized the notion of the "modernity of sectarianism" and explained the politicization of sectarian identities as both a reaction and an alternative to the late Ottoman modernization attempts,[23] a significant part of the existing literature appears to be positioned on a continuum, with primordialist and instrumentalist understandings at either end.[24]

Lebanese Marxist scholars such as Mas'ud Dahir and Fawwaz Traboulsi have argued that sectarian identities and praxis cannot be disconnected from the dimension of social class and class conflict. Sectarianism is best understood, in their perspective, not as a form of false consciousness, but rather as a historically determined mode of Lebanon's incorporation (and that of the Middle East at large) in the capitalist world-system.[25]

15
Hagopian, "Maronite Hegemony to Maronite Militancy."

16
Alexander Henley, "Politics of a Church at War: Maronite Catholicism in the Lebanese Civil War," *Mediterranean Politics* 13, no. 3 (2008): 353–69.

17
Lewis Snider, "The Lebanese Forces: Their Origins and Role in Lebanon's Politics," *Middle East Journal* 38, no. 1 (1984): 1–33. Ghassan Hage, "Religious Fundamentalism as a Political Strategy: The Evolution of the Lebanese Forces' Religious Discourse During the Lebanese Civil War," *Critique of Anthropology* 12, no. 1 (1992): 27–45.

18
Christian Thuselt, " 'Dream of a Republic': Lebanese Political Parties as 'Real Parties' " (PhD diss., Roskilde University, 2018).

19
It should be noted here that an offspring of this milieu is Walid Phares, a former ideologue of the Lebanese Forces who authored a book called *Lebanese Christian Nationalism: The Rise and Fall of an Ethnic Resistance* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), and later became a controversial foreign policy advisor on the Middle East to US presidential candidates Mitt Romney and Donald Trump. See in Ishaan Tharoor, "The dark, controversial past of Trump's counterterrorism adviser," *The Washington Post*, March 22, 2016.

20
Felsch, "The Rise of Christian Nationalism."

21
Fanar Haddad, "Sectarian Identity and National Identity in the Middle East," *Nations and Nationalism* 26, no. 1 (2020): 123–37.

22
May Darwich, Tamirace Fakhoury, "Casting the Other as an Existential Threat: The Securitisation of Sectarianism in the International Relations of the Syria Crisis," *Global Discourse* 6, no. 4 (2016): 712–32.

23
Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism. Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

24
Whereas the first approach reads religious allegiance as the source of collective identities and political mobilization, the latter understands sectarianism as a discourse of legitimization that revolves around the distribution of resources and services. Gause argues that sectarianism should be understood not as the product of unchangeable identities, but rather as an effect of the failure of the state-building process in the Middle East. See in F. Gregory III Gause, "Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War," *Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper* 11 (2014).

25
This perspective was further developed by Hasan Hamdan, better known under his *nom de plume* Mahdi

'Amil, who radically challenged the essentialization of sectarian identities, and convincingly conceptualized sectarianism as a political discourse and practice that is constructed in connection with the spread of capitalism, colonialism, and the quest for the control of the postcolonial state. See in Kais Firro, *Inventing Lebanon: Nationalism and the State under the Mandate* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 56–67.

26
Hannes Baumann, "The Causes, Nature, and Effects of the Current Crisis of Lebanese Capitalism," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 1 (2019): 61–77.

27
Melani Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

28
Joanne Randa Nucho, *Everyday Sectarianism in Urban Lebanon: Infrastructures, Public Services, and Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

29
Paraskevas Konortas, "Nationalisms vs Millets: Building Collective Identities in Ottoman Thrace," in *Spatial Conceptions of the Nation: Modernizing Geographies in Greece and Turkey*, ed. P. Nikiforos Diamandouros, Thalia Dragonas and Çağlar Keyder (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 161–80.

30
Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*, 172.

31
Asher Kaufman, "Phoenicianism: The Formation of an Identity in Lebanon in 1920," *Middle Eastern Studies* 37, no. 1 (2001): 173–94.

32
Kais Firro, "Lebanese Nationalism versus Arabism: From Bulus Nujaym to Michel Chiha," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 5 (2004): 1–27.

33
Rafaël Herzstein, "Les pères jésuites et les Maronites du Mont-Liban: l'Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth," *Histoire et missions chrétiennes* 9, no. 1 (2009): 149–75.

34
Dennis Patrick Walker, "Clericist Catholic Authors and the Crystallization of Historical Memory of World War I in Lebanonist–Particularist Discourse, 1918–1922," *Islamic Studies* 48, no. 2 (2009): 219–60.

Important recent contributions have interwoven sectarianism with neopatrimonialism, clientelism, and the fragility of the rentier model,[26] or have analyzed its political economy through the prism of its systems of alternative welfare,[27] or its spatialized dimension through the provision of services in exchange for political support in urban neighborhoods.[28]

The ongoing debate on the nature of sectarianism has fostered a vigorous and stimulating scholarly discussion that continues to shed light on Lebanon's political history. Here, however, I suggest that significant insight can also be acquired through studying the intersection between nationalism and religious identities, relying on the theoretical frameworks and case studies related to the late Ottoman and post-Ottoman period in different areas of the former Ottoman Empire. Based on the existing literature on nationalism studies, nationalist historiographies, and modernizing geographies in the post-Ottoman space, I intend to shed light on the attempt at fostering homogenizing and exclusive identities that are constructed as the foundation of mass political mobilization, through the morphing of fluid Ottoman *millet* identities into new national allegiances.[29] In particular, this process takes place through the sectarianization of space, sometimes turning it into faithspaces, and through the consolidation of an emotional community around a charismatic leader.

Images of the Homeland: Geography and Identity

In 1919, Charles Corm rallied a group of ardent Francophile businessmen and intellectuals around the project of a literary journal called *La Revue Phénicienne* that supported the idea of an independent Lebanon under French tutelage within its supposedly natural borders. The journal postulated that modern Lebanon was the continuation of the ancient Phoenician civilization, and framed the latter in a trans-Mediterranean geography and a European civilization context through the mythological connections between Agenor, the Phoenician king of Tyre, and his son Cadmus, founder and first king of Thebes. This "resurrection" of Phoenicia, as Salibi put it,[30] was largely in line with other nationalist movements in the Middle East, which sought to ground national identities and political legitimacy in their ancient, glorious past. Archaeological digs, origin mythologies, and foundational epics all conveyed a sense of national pride and a fed a narrative of anticolonial redemption through the recovery of past grandeur and political independence.[31]

Corm and his acolytes were influenced by the political thought of the French nationalist Right, which had found its way into the Christian intellectual circles of Beirut and Mount Lebanon through the Jesuit-run Université Saint-Joseph, founded in 1875. In the highly volatile context of Mount Lebanon under Ottoman rule in the nineteenth century, schools and colleges run by the Jesuits had sought to counter the expansion of Protestant, pro-British educational institutions, and to promote a Catholic education that was French in language, culture, curriculum, and political orientation.[32] On the one hand, Jesuit-run facilities became the incubator of a new Christian political and intellectual elite that was overwhelmingly Catholic by religion and Francophile by culture.[33] On the other hand, the same schools acted as a conveyor belt for the clericalist conservative thought of the French Right as it was developed during the years of the Third Republic.[34]

Among the authors that most influenced Corm and the *La Revue*

Phénicienne circle, Maurice Barrès played a special role. Barrès was a French writer and politician who was a close associate of Gabriele D'Annunzio and Charles Maurras, the founder of the monarchist Action Française. From his relationship with Maurras and Paul Déroulède, Barrès developed the notion of *nationalisme intégral* and praised a holistic view of a human community finally purged of its allogenous elements and brought back to its supposed authenticity.[35] In his view, the nation would form a spiritual and organic totality, revitalized and unified through its common origin once all the elements outside the national consensus (by which he implied social conflicts and religious minorities) were eventually removed.[36] The value Barrès accorded to the relationship between *la terre et les morts* ("the land and the dead") led him to confer outstanding significance to some specific places that he considered as infused with the memory of collective sacrifice or with an aura of supernatural energy. There he felt the beating pulse of the nation, as he did at the hill of Sion-Vaudémont, which he celebrated in his 1913 poem, *La Colline inspirée*.[37]

After a trip to the Levant in 1914, Barrès wrote *Une enquête aux pays du Levant*, where he exalted the supernatural force exuding from some place connected to Phoenician and Greek mythology. The nascent Lebanese nationalist discourse enthusiastically embraced this celebration, and embraced in an almost cult-like manner the veneration of Lebanon's *paysage* (landscape) as the receptacle of the nation's essence and character.[38] Barrès expressed theories that were useful to refute the pan-Arab thesis, which postulated a common pan-Arab national identity based on the use of Classical Arabic as a literary language and the use of various vernacular forms of Arabic as the main language of everyday interaction. In fact, writers and intellectuals during and after World War I argued for a distinct Lebanese (or alternatively Syrian) national identity based on territory (in a strongly deterministic sense) and historical memory rather than language.[39]

Corm expanded these themes in a 1934 poem titled *La Montagne inspirée*, in a clear reference to the work by Barrès. The core of the poem is a tribute to Lebanon's civilizational mission through the ages and its extraneity relative to its Arab-Islamic surroundings. Corm used references to the Crusades to celebrate the relations between Maronite and Frankish rulers (and, by extension, between Lebanon and France) and to consolidate the historical essence of Lebanon as a quintessentially Christian area, part of the sacred geography of the Bible and the history of Christianity.[40] Corm shared with Barrès the idea that some places were endowed with a special role in the history and the identity of the nation, and believed in the persistence of a *genius loci* that shaped the particular character of Lebanon, or its *Volksgeist*.[41]

The combination of an idea of the land as foundational for national identity, with an idea of the land as a mountain refuge for oppressed religious minorities, nourished a narrative that praised the exceptional features of Lebanon and its difference from the rest of the Middle East. In this narrative, the mountain region known in modern times as Mount Lebanon (*Ǧabal Lubnān* in Arabic) was at once the main demographic cluster of the Christian population, the historical precursor of an independent Lebanon,[42] and, metaphorically speaking, the embodiment of the identity and values of the nation.

In a wartime poster of the Lebanese Forces, a Christian right-wing militia (today a political party), a snowy and apparently barren mountain landscape features a vertical jet that looks like a stylized human figure

35
Thuselt, "Dream of a Republic," 87–88.

36
Asher Kaufman, "From 'La Colline inspirée' to 'La Montagne inspirée': Maurice Barrès and Lebanese Nationalism," in *France and the Middle East: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. Michel Abitbol (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2004), 225–46.

37
Bernard Heyberger, "Saint Charbel Makhlouf, ou la consécration de l'identité maronite," in *Saints et héros du Moyen-Orient contemporain*, ed. Catherine Mayeur-Jouen (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2003), 139–59.

Asher Kaufman, " 'Tell Us Our History': Charles Corm, Mount Lebanon and Lebanese Nationalism," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 3 (2004): 1–28.

38
Raja Choueiri, *Les sites paysagers de la mémoire du Liban* (Baabda: Felix Béryte, 2012), 228.

39
Kaufman, "From 'La Colline inspirée' to 'La Montagne inspirée.' "

40
Charles Corm, *La Montagne inspirée. Chansons de geste* (Beyrouth: Éditions de la Revue Phénicienne, 1934), 52–56, 91.

41
Choueiri, *Les sites paysagers*, 221.

42
The region of Mount Lebanon was indirectly ruled by the Ottoman Empire through a quasi-feudal system of landowning families and received an autonomous status with wide prerogatives of self-government through the *Règlement Organique* of 1861 and 1864.

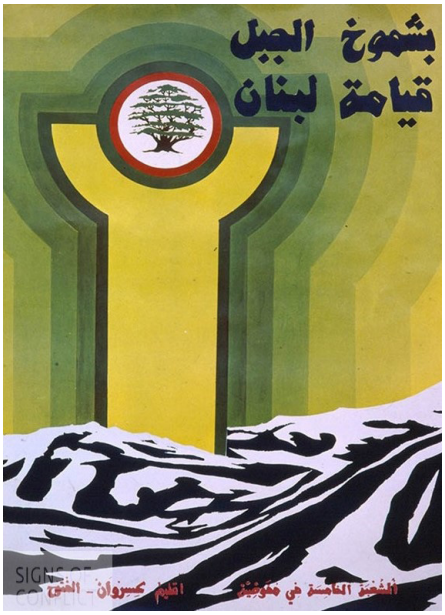


Fig. 1. Through the highness of the mountain, the resurrection of Lebanon. Collection Wassim Jabre.

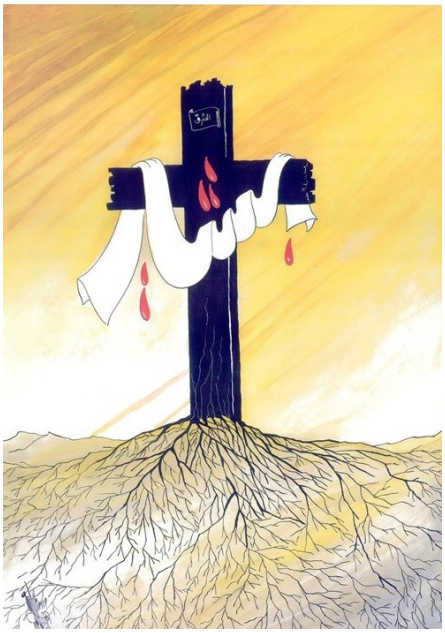


Fig. 2. Lebanon. Photograph © Pierre Sadek. Collection Wassim Jabre.

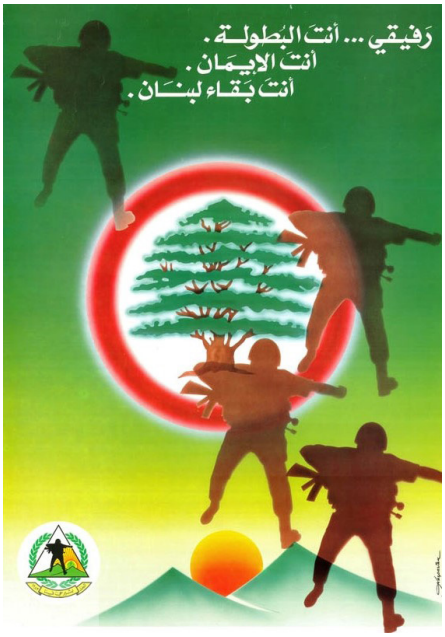


Fig. 3. My comrade, you are heroism, you are faith, you are the persistance of Lebanon. Photograph © Kasparian. Collection Wassim Jabre.

holding a party logo. A smaller caption in the margin below locates this poster in the region of Kisrawan-Ftouh, the major stronghold of Lebanese Forces during most of the war period. The main caption reads, "Through the highness of the mountain, the resurrection of Lebanon." (Fig. 1) Here the word *šumūḫ* (which can be translated as glory, honor, or pride, and therefore is meant to suggest moral as well as orographic elevation) is associated with the word *qiyāmah*, which means resurrection in the afterlife, and is usually associated with doomsday and, in an Arabic-speaking Christian context, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The parallelism between the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the tribulations of Lebanon during the war is a frequent trope. It clearly appears in a poster designed in 1982 by Pierre Sadek, a prominent political cartoonist and fervent supporter of Lebanese nationalism,[43] in the aftermath of the assassination of President Bashir al-Jumayyil, the former military commander and charismatic leader of the Christian right-wing Lebanese Front. Here, the cross of Christ is planted in the land of Lebanon, and is actually a tree that is rooted in the mountainous landscape. The white cloth on the cross is dripping blood, and is positioned in a way that could also loosely resemble the word *Lubnān* (Lebanon) in Arabic script. (Fig. 2)

A greenish mountain landscape with a rising sun forms the backdrop for yet another poster with a repeated image of a fighter in full combat gear and a giant logo of the Lebanese Forces. The caption reads, "My comrade . . . You are heroism, you are faith, you are the persistence of Lebanon." (Fig. 3) As Maasri notes,[44] this poster offers an abridged version of another, text-laden one that praises the virtues of the prototypical Christian fighter. Addressed to an ideal "resisting comrade" who is fighting in the mountains, the manifesto states that "through your faith, you fought for the sake of the most precious, holiest, and deepest of the causes," which is the protection of "our free, dignified Christian existence in this environment." The militia fighter is defined as "the shield of our Christian people, the defensive wall of its freedom, and the guarantee for its

43 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 46.

44 Maasri, *Off the Wall*, 112.

Fig. 4. My resisting comrade . . . Bashir lives in us so that our Lebanon remains alive. Collection Hoover Institution Archives.

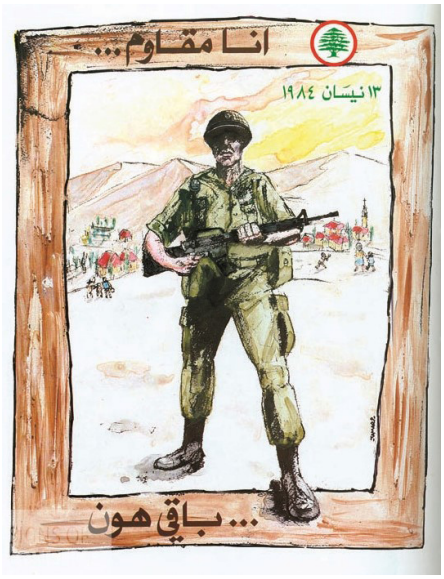


Fig. 5. I am a resistant . . . I remain here. Photograph © Tamari.

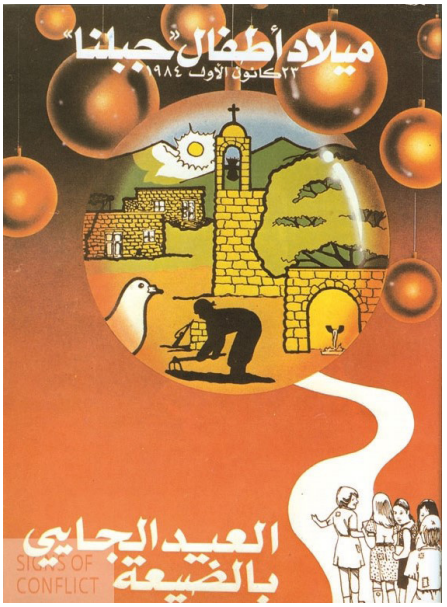


Fig. 6. The Christmas of the children of our mountain, 22 December 1984 . . . The coming holiday in the village.

survival." (Fig. 4) A visual rendition of all these concepts appeared in 1984 in the issue 29 of *al-Masīrah*, the journal of the Lebanese Forces, on the occasion of the ninth anniversary of the civil war's outbreak. Here an armed soldier stands solidly in the foreground, in an assertive posture, guarding an idyllic mountain village in the background, replete with red-tiled houses, orchards, and children walking towards a church with its steeple. (Fig. 5) On December 22, 1984, the same journal published a poster titled *Milād atfāl ǧabalnā* ("Christmas of the children of our mountain," with emphasis on the adjective "our"). Here the composition brims with nostalgia: the scenery is lush and sunny, and a farmer is tilling the land in an archetypal mountain village with stone houses, a well, a fountain, and a church at its very heart. The scene takes the form of a Christmas ornament, as if it were a Christmas wish, with children in black and white in the foreground, starting along the path that might bring them back to the colors of the village. (Fig. 6)

The historical context of the last image is the "War of the Mountain," fought in the Chouf region and central Lebanon between September 1983 and February 1984. The Lebanese National Resistance Front (Druze and Communist militias) utterly defeated the Lebanese Forces, and Christian civilians were expulsed from the region. The caption of the 1984 poster reads, "Next Christmas in the village," alluding to the prospect of a swift return, whereas the process in fact took decades, and was certainly not achieved through military means.[45]

On the one hand, the trope of the village as a place of belonging and a *lieu de mémoire* is a mainstay in Lebanese nationalist discourse that predates the civil war and is still powerful today. The rural idyll of the mountain village remains strongly evocative of a largely fictionalized traditional lifestyle, far from the hustle and bustle of Beirut, the big city, where identity, family ties, and values are supposedly diluted.

The 1967 musical film *Safar Barlik*, written by the Rahbani brothers and starring Lebanese diva Fairouz, is a romanticized story of love and resistance against the Ottoman general mobilization and a call to arms in World War I. The events are set in an imaginary (and mostly unlikely) village that apparently has no overt confessional affiliation, but that can

45 Ruth Michaelson, "Chouf's war-displaced Christian Lebanese to return to their homes," *RFI*, April 21, 2015.

be assumed as mostly Christian because of its location in the highlands.[46] The script still clings to the patriotic narrative of a shared national entente among Christians and Muslims against Ottoman rule, depicted as despotic, ridiculous, and corrupt at the same time.

This narrative was celebrated in *Les pleureuses* ("The weeping women"), a sculpture created by Yusuf Hoyek in 1930 for a major square in the center of Beirut and dedicated to a group of "martyrs," or leading nationalist figures who had been sentenced to death by the Ottoman military governor Cemal Paşa in the spring of 1915.[47] At that time, and even more so in the following decades, the rhetoric of national unity uneasily tried to hide the reality of a very heated debate on the definition of Lebanon's national identity and the forever unresolved tension between Lebaneseness and Arabness.[48] In *Where Do We Go Now?*, a 2011 film directed by Nadine Labaki, a remote mountain village appears as an idealized microcosm, marked by both friendship and tensions between Christians and Muslims, which seemingly encapsulates all the characteristics of Lebanon, taking the metaphor of the nation as a village and the village as the mirror of the nation to the most conspicuous level.[49]

On the other hand, however, Christian nationalist representations of the mountain village include an additional layer. The village does not merely appear as "Lebanese" or "traditional,"[50] whatever the two terms might mean: it is explicitly Christian. The religious dimension of this imagery conveys a sense of belonging and a community-based perception of the *entre-soi* that reflects the deeply spatialized nature of Lebanese sectarianism in its everyday materiality. In post-conflict Lebanon, urban, peri-urban, and rural spaces are contested and refashioned along confessional lines, through the reproduction of physical and symbolical borders and boundaries: oversized churches, huge crosses on higher grounds, roadside shrines, and statues of saints are built and maintained to reinforce the Christian character of villages and landscapes, acting in every way as land markers and bordering devices.[51]

The signification of space through religious symbols is a central component in the construction of sectarian narratives that portray locals in opposition to a stereotyped (albeit historically changeable) Other. The latter is invariably seen as savage, cruel, and as a threat to the ontological security of the community, in a reductionist and often obsessive understanding of history. The territorial limits of the village (or an urban neighborhood that sometimes reproduces village relationships and mentalities) are therefore seen as the front line in defending the group's identity and its self-perception.[52] As a play on words and religious stereotypes, the enemy is described as *al-qātil* ("the murderer"), while the devout Christian soldier (*al-muqātil*, or "the combatant") is photographed in a moment of prayer. (Fig. 7) In order to keep Lebanon on the world's map, (Fig. 8) the external other (such as the Ottoman rulers, the Syrian army, or the Palestinian militants) must be defeated in the same way as the internal other (such as leftists and non-conformist Christians). (Fig. 9)

Among the prominent features in the aesthetics of Lebanese nationalism, the cedar tree also has a central place. It figures on the national flag, institutional logos, commercial brands, and party symbols. According to Sassine, a careful scrutiny of right-wing publications, including the journal *Lebnaan* between 1975 and 1979, shows how the cedar tree was described as a national motif that dated back to the Phoenician era, when it was used in shipyards as a prestige commodity.[53] In this way, the cedar

46
The movie can be watched here: accessed December 18, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1e5UZ1Ly60.

47
Lucia Volk, *Memorials and Martyrs in Modern Lebanon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 59.

48
Samir Kassir, *Beirut* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 284, 331–33.

49
The idea of the village as a laid-back place, where traditions, cultural heritage (*turāt*), and a leisurely pace of life are preserved is not a prerogative of Lebanese Christians. In fact, the dichotomy between urban and rural makes little sense in a country where village insularity is reduced by geographical proximity and elaborate patterns of resettlement from the countryside to the city. Idyllic villages in pristine settings, completely detached from the trappings of modernity and mass politics, are therefore more of a narrative device than the reality on the ground. See in Augustus Richard Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 31.

50
The trope of the mountain village complements the depiction of the Mediterranean Sea in Lebanese nationalist narratives. In the 1950s and 1960s, Lebanon's maritime dimension was profoundly saturated with ideas of leisure and fashionability that reinforced the allure of Beirut as the "Paris of the East." See in Kassir, *Beirut*, 304–9, 365–66, and 385–408. Images of beach clubs with young women in bikinis, seaside restaurants, yachts, and night clubs were, however, not only part of a general trend of promoting tourism across the Mediterranean; most importantly, they embedded Lebanon in a clear Mediterranean geography and history that looked westwards and emphasized the connections with Europe. See in Zeina Maasri, "Troubled Geography: Imagining Lebanon in 1960s Tourist Promotion," in *National Design Histories in an Age of Globalization*, ed. Kjetil Fallan and Grace Lees–Maffei (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 125–40.

51
See for example in Emma Aubin-Boltanski, "Miracles and Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Lebanon: the Proof is in the Eyes of the Other," *Religiographies* 1, no. 1 (2022): 82–95.

52
Chantal Mazaeff, "L'action des Forces Libanaises à Aïn al-Remmané : un intense travail de réhabilitation et de socialisation politique," in *Leaders et partisans au Liban*, ed. Franck Mermier and Sabrina Mervin (Paris: Karthala, 2012), 263–83. Tsolin Nalbantian, "Lebanese Power Struggles and Fashioning 'Armenian' Space, 1957–1958," *Review of Middle East Studies* 47, no. 2 (2013): 218–27.

53
Sassine, "Le libanisme maronite," 362–63.

Fig.7. The murderer . . . The combatant. Collection Hoover Institution Archives.

Fig. 8. Collection Wassim Jabre.

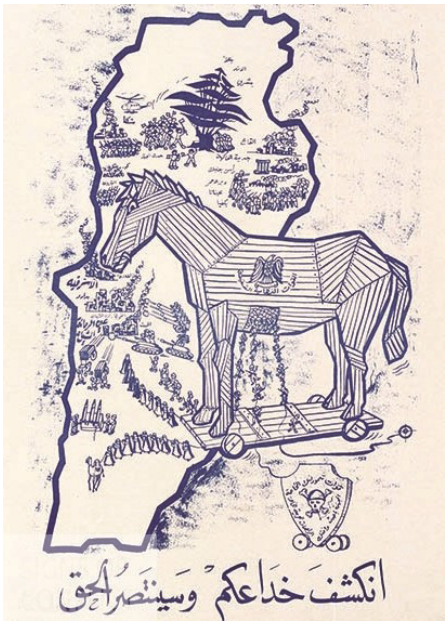


Fig. 9. Your schemes are uncovered and justice will triumph.

tree reinforced the connection between territory and heritage, geography and history. More important, however, was the religious interpretation of the cedar tree, which was described in these publications as the biggest and most beautiful plant, created by God as a testimony to the special, benevolent attention he reserved for the land of Lebanon as part of the sacred geography of the Holy Land. The cedar tree features in the Song of Songs (5:15), where it is said about one of the two lovers that "his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars," while the bride is defined as "a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon" (4:15), but also like "the lily among thorns" (2:2). Maronite tradition reads the song as an allegory of the relationship between Christ and the Maronite Church, besieged by heretics and infidels,[54] whereas Christian nationalist discourses by the end of the 1970s read the song in terms of the relationship between God and Lebanon.

A few decades earlier, Charles Corm waxed lyrical about the mystical halo of the cedar tree, which he saw as suggesting nobility, majesty, and sturdy perseverance in the face of marauding armies and invading empires which invariably crumbled at its feet. In *La Montagne inspirée*, cedars incarnate the power of resilience based on Christian values and the merits of a rural, modest life (in opposition to the decadence and miscegenation of city life). The cedar is both the image and the metaphor of Wadi Qadisha, the heartland of the Maronites and the holy valley of the monks who fled their lands of origin and retreated to the furthest mountains to preserve their faith and identity.[55]

All these religious images and symbols reinforce the connection with the land and the political claims attached to it, leaving a distinctly Christian stamp on the Christian Lebanese nationalist discourse about the landscape.

Images of the Leader: Charisma and Sainthood

In this section, I would like to show how religious images are equally powerful in the construction and legitimization of charismatic leaders.

Throughout the twentieth century, the political arena in present-day

54 Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*, 72.

55 Sassine, "Le libanisme maronite," 142–43.

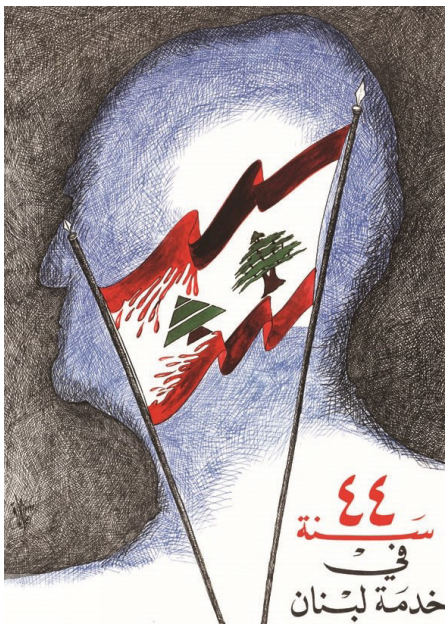


Fig. 10. 44 years at the service of Lebanon. Photograph © Pierre Sadek. Collection Karl Bassil.

Lebanon has been defined by client politics around urban and rural notables, who usually drew (and continue to draw) their power and legitimacy from inheritance, familial relationships, personal patrimony, and a strong bond with their territory of origin.[56]

In the Christian context, notables, or *zuʿamā'* as they are called in local parlance, often encountered stiff opposition from the Maronite Church, whose lower clergy and monastic orders had sympathized with peasant uprisings since the nineteenth century,[57] and from mass-based parties as a result of urbanization in the twentieth century.[58] Since the 1930s, mass parties, mostly supported by students, lower-middle class employees, and professionals, and recently urbanized manual laborers, presented themselves as the champions of the common folk and the only alternative to the notables.[59]

The Christian nationalist parties presented themselves as the heralds of modernity and, at the same time, the gatekeepers of tradition. On the one hand, they exhibited the features of a modern nationalist mass-based party, in contrast to the quasi-feudal landlords and their clientele; on the other hand, they staunchly referred to the values and doctrine of the Maronite Church, of which they aspired to become the temporal representatives.[60]

In the case of Pierre al-Jumayyil, the founder of the Lebanese Phalanges Party, and his son Bashir, arguably the most iconic representative of Christian nationalism in Lebanon, the political ideology was centered along two main axes: on the one hand, an idea of the nation as a community of will, with its specific "mission" or "cause" (*qaḍiyyah*) inferred by a teleological interpretation of history; on the other hand, a positioning that is defined as "popular" (*šʿabī*), but that could more properly be labeled as populist or *völkisch*, standing in contrast with the perceived elitism of traditional politics and calling for the establishment of a strong (*qāwī*) state.[61]

Both Pierre and Bashir al-Jumayyil combined populism with a cult of youthfulness, virility, and physical vigor, which mirrored the spiritual vigor of a rejuvenated Christian community, eventually woke, united, and brimming with awareness (*waʿī*).[62] Ostentations of *machismo* and military hierarchy coexisted with the cult of the leader, especially when it helped to mobilize disenfranchised youth in urban peripheries.[63]

The charismatic legitimization of the leader in the Lebanese Christian arena has been understood as a relationship between leader and followers based on the defense of the national cause and the desire to build an affective community. In a poster created by Pierre Sadek for the Lebanese Phalanges Party, Pierre al-Jumayyil is portrayed as a stylized profile against a darker background. His body is crossed by two flags: one is the national flag of Lebanon; the other bears the logo of the party, but the red stripes of the national flag morph into streams and drops of blood, suggesting a notion of self-sacrifice at the expense of one own's life that is reinforced by the caption, proudly celebrating "forty-four years at the service of Lebanon." (Fig. 10)

The leader needn't be a winner all the time. His defeats and troubles mirror the nation's predicament and can be framed through registers and images that evoke the Passion and Resurrection of Christ. In a 1983 poster, the portrait of Pierre al-Jumayyil is superimposed over a botched image of the statue of *Yasūʿ al-malik* (Christ the King), which hovers above the bay of Jounieh, the Christian stronghold to which many Christians fled from Beirut during the civil war.[64] The caption in Arabic

56
This dimension of Lebanese politics has been studied across different geographies and sectarian affiliations. See in Michael Johnson, *Class and Client in Beirut: the Sunni Muslim Community and the Lebanese State 1840–1985* (London: Ithaca Press, 1986); Michael Gilsenan, *Lords of the Lebanese Marches: Violence and Narrative in an Arab Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); and Tamara Chalabi, *The Shi'is of Jabal 'Amil and the New Lebanon: Community and Nation-State, 1918–1943* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).

57
Arturo Marzano, *Terra laica. La religione e i conflitti in Medio Oriente* (Roma: Viella, 2022), 102–15.

58
Melhem Chaoul, "Zahlé : de la *zaʿâma* nationale à la *zaʿâma* dépendante," in *Leaders et partisans au Liban*, ed. Franck Mermier and Sabrina Mervin (Paris: Karthala, 2012), 435–59. For a thorough analysis of notable-based politics in the city of Zahlah, see also Arnold Hottinger, "Zu'amā' and Parties in the Lebanese Crisis of 1958," *Middle East Journal* 15, no. 2 (1961): 127–40; Peter Gubser, "The *Zu'ama'* of Zaḥlah: The Current Situation in a Lebanese Town," *Middle East Journal* 27, no. 2 (1973): 173–89.

59
Dylan Baun, *Winning Lebanon: Youth Politics, Populism, and the Production of Sectarian Violence, 1920–1958* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 22–70.

60
Emma Aubin-Boltanski, "Samir Geagea : le guerrier, le martyr et le *zaʿîm*," in *Leaders et partisans au Liban*, ed. Franck Mermier and Sabrina Mervin (Paris: Karthala, 2012), 57–80.

61
Christian Thuselt, "Milizen als Surrogat eines dysfunktionales Staates: Das Beispiel der 'Lebanese

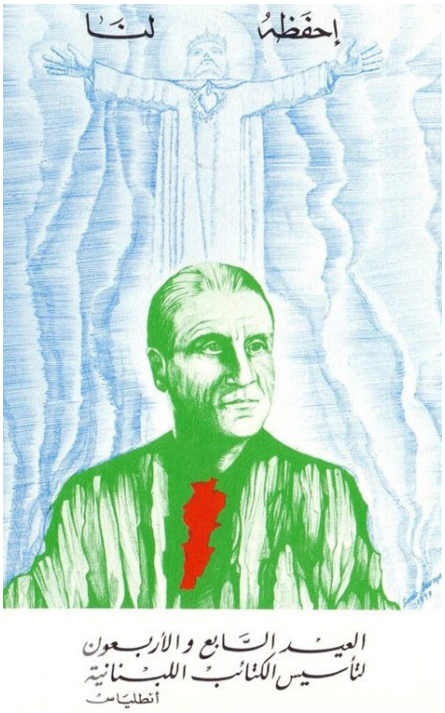


Fig. 11. Preserve it for us . . . The forty-seventh anniversary of the foundation of the Lebanese Phalanges. Collection Wassim Jabre.

Fig. 12. 14 September. Photograph © Raidy. Collection Zeina Maasri.

can be translated in multiple ways. It might be interpreted as "Protect him for our sake," where the faithful ask Jesus to protect Pierre al-Jumayyil. However, it could also be interpreted as "Protect it for our sake," meaning Lebanon. In this case, the addressee might be Jesus or Pierre al-Jumayyil himself. Whereas the statue of Jesus displays what in Catholic iconography is referred to as the Sacred Heart, the leader is shown as literally having the entirety of Lebanon in lieu of his heart. (Fig. 11)

The relevance of religious symbolism, in particular in the Maronite tradition, in the process of iconizing the leader can be fully appreciated in the case of the late President Bashir al-Jumayyil. According to Haugbølle, the particularity of the constructed image of Bashir al-Jumayyil lies in the ubiquity of references to the cedar (in the sense explained earlier) and the cross of Christ, which allows Christian right-wing propaganda to depict him as the sacrificial lamb.[65] There is a plethora of audiovisual sources, whose modes of fruition are important in Haugbølle's analysis as much as their content. Such sources feed into a veneration of the leader that is full of explicit references and implicit subtexts of a religious nature: the death of Bashir al-Jumayyil echoes the Passion of Christ, and revivifying his political message means the rebirth of the Christian Lebanese identity. Bashir al-Jumayyil was assassinated on September 14, 1982. A poster produced for the anniversary of his death shows the leader's face inside a cone of light that is projected from heaven onto the land of Lebanon against a very dark and slightly menacing background. Even if there are no explicit references to God, the composition of the scene is reminiscent of Catholic (and Orthodox) images of the Baptism and the Transfiguration of Jesus. (Fig. 12)

The parallelism of Jesus and Bashir al-Jumayyil is taken to the extreme in a poster drawn by political cartoonist Pierre Sadek in 1982, where the assassinated leader is shown wearing a crown of thorns, just like Jesus along the Way of the Cross. The thorns are in fact a form of stylized lettering of the word *Lubnān* ("Lebanon"), with the dots of the Arabic letters

Forces,' " *Sicherheit und Frieden (S+F) / Security and Peace* 53, no. 4 (2015): 193–99.

62
Aulas, "The Socio-Ideological Development of the Maronite Community."

63
Frank Stoakes, "The Supervigilantes: The Lebanese Kataeb Party as a Builder, Surrogate and Defender of the State," *Middle Eastern Studies* 11, no. 3 (1975): 215–36.

64
Patrick E. Tyler, "Pressures Threaten Christian Lebanon's Calm," *The Washington Post*, March 5, 1987, accessed March 21, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1987/03/05/pressures-threaten-christian-lebanons-calm/9d5b16f7-bce1-4873-be88-463e1fe55968/.

65
Sune Haugbølle, "The Secular Saint. Iconography and Ideology in the Cult of Bashir Jumayil," in *Politics of Worship in the Contemporary Middle East: Sainthood in Fragile States*, ed. Andreas Bandak and Mikkel Bille (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 191–212.

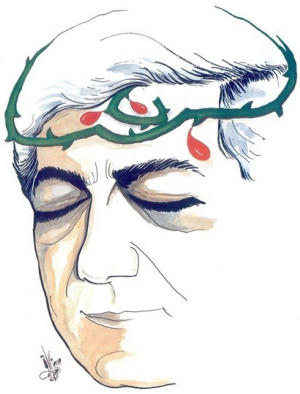


Fig. 13. Lebanon. Photograph © Pierre Sadek. Collection Wassim Jabre.

Fig. 14. The procession goes on . . . 13 April 1983. Photograph © Pierre Sadek. Collection Wassim Jabre.

66
Thuselt, "Milizen als Surrogat eines dysfunktionales Staates."

67
Formerly a militia leader who rose through the ranks of the Lebanese Forces and became its leader in the middle of the 1980s, Samir Ja'ja' was jailed between 1994 and 2005 and, since then, has been the leader of the Lebanese Forces refashioned as a political party within the "14 March" coalition.

68
Aubin-Boltanski, "Samir Geagea : le guerrier, le martyr et le *za'îm*."

bā' and *nūn* rendered as drops of blood. (Fig. 13)

The (male) leader can be an exceptional individual who is praised for his qualities, virtues, and achievements, but most importantly he is seen as the person who embodies the aspirations and feelings of his entire constituency. It is for this reason that hagiographies of leaders are often composed through the register of continuing "the dream" (*ḥulm*), meaning the more idealistic political aspirations of the Christian constituency, in contrast with an economic and political reality that seems either depressing or dysfunctional.[66] It is therefore not surprising that many posters celebrate or call for the continuation of the *masīrah*, which can be literally translated as "procession," but in political contexts is more often associated with the political path of the party, especially when it is involved in highly contentious and conflictual politics. In a poster commissioned by the Lebanese Forces in April 1983, the assassinated leader appears to be participating in a sort of relay race, passing a weapon as if it were a baton to a nondescript fighter who can nevertheless be identified as a member of the Lebanese Forces because of the delta sign on his equipment. (Fig. 14)

The images of wartime posters are largely consistent with considerations raised in later case studies of political anthropology in the Lebanese Christian context. This area of research shows how the practices of commemoration of Lebanese Christian leaders still draw on the symbolic repertoire of Christianity in Lebanon, with a particular emphasis on the images of the two fighting saints, George and Elias, who stand out as nationalist symbols against foreign enemies and invaders.

The image of Samir Ja'ja', for example, combines elements of deep mysticism, messianic anxieties, and a rhetoric based on notions of mission and martyrdom.[67] At once a hardened warlord and a devout Christian, Ja'ja' seemingly projects an image of sainthood that, in line with the traditions and perceptions of Eastern Christianity, can alternate military assertiveness with monachal ascesis.[68] Ja'ja', who often boasted about his humble social and geographical origins to differentiate himself from the elites, is often compared to the "resistants" of the nineteenth century, like the monk Ephrem;[69] the mystic peasant Taniyus Shahin, who led the anti-feudal peasant uprising in 1858; and the "saint of the mountain," Charbel Makhlouf, who has been venerated since the 1950s as a Christian and national icon who embodies the essence of Maronitism.

According to Heyberger, the relatively recent construction of the cult of Charbel Makhlouf is extremely important in what he calls the consecration of Maronite identity. The veneration of this saint appears largely influenced by the counter-revolutionary religiosity of rural France at the end of the nineteenth century, and is largely sustained by the nationalist and spiritualist thought of Maurice Barrès. Notions of ascesis, suffering, and martyrdom are compared with, and connected to the history of the Christians of Lebanon, and in particular of the Maronites, who are imagined as being a mountain fortress always at risk of subjugation and assimilation. The rhetoric of the land and its roots strengthens the idea of Lebanon as a bulwark for Christians, who supposedly enjoy a privileged relationship with the land and therefore should have a superior political status. The cult of Saint Charbel, in Heyberger's analysis, stands at the crossroads between religion, territory, and identity, providing a sense of destiny for the country and its leading component.[70]

A fusion of charismatic, populist, and messianic tropes also comes through in the interviews conducted by Lefort[71] with a sample of militants

and supporters of Michel Aoun.[72] His followers often portray him as a man of providence, a popular leader who fights for reinstating a sovereign state as an alternative to armed militias and against the interference of foreign governments. The tragic events of the so-called (and ill-fated) "war of liberation" against the Lebanese Forces and the Syrian army between March 1989 and October 1990 are read in a frame of death and rebirth, where Aoun's lifetime events evoke the ancient Near Eastern and Greek myth of Tammuz/Adonis and the Passion of Christ. Many followers ascribe to their leader an almost prophetic ability to read the historical and political trends, and to anticipate the strategic choices that can inaugurate a better future for the Christians of Lebanon. The nature of "savior" (*muḫalliṣ*) that some followers ascribe to Aoun is connected with their hope for a renewed strength of Lebanon's Christians vis-à-vis the (real or perceived) threats represented by the final implantation of Palestinian and Syrian refugees, or the rise of Islamist militant groups. Despite its sovereignist and allegedly anti-sectarian agenda, the discourse among many of Aoun's followers is therefore replete with markedly sectarian perceptions and contents. At the same time, according to Abirached,[73] Aoun's political path shows how a charismatic relationship might play out in a different temporality than one based on electoral cycles and short-term notions of victory and defeat. From this perspective, charisma in politics seems to be grounded not in the actual achievements of the leaders or their individual qualities, but in their ability to activate or reactivate political boundaries that allow the members of the group to perceive themselves as parts of a full political subjectivity.

It has been argued that the construction of an imagined emotional proximity helps to reanimate the relationship between the masses and the leader, to project individual anxieties and expectations into a collective dimension, and to develop a poetics of hope that feeds the *emotionale Vergemeinschaftung* ("emotional community-building") that Weber sees as the core of charismatic authority.[74]

What is specific to the Lebanese Christian nationalist discourse is how these dimensions of leadership cult and this construction of the imagined community are solidly framed by religious images and concepts that can be powerfully evoked and mobilized. However, it would be misleading, in my opinion, to understand this process as an instance of permanence of primordial religious identities. As I showed earlier, the construction of nationalist doctrines in Lebanon is a modern phenomenon that is largely connected with the rise and development of nationalist ideas in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe. Religious and, in this specific case, Christian images and themes are used as a language that is deployed by nationalist politics in times of frenetic change and uncertainty.

In line with the conclusions proposed by Karaömerlioğlu in his analysis of the political thought of Nurettin Topçu and his doctrine of Anatolianism,[75] I argue that the particular connection of nationalist and religious tropes in the Christian Lebanese context is not merely an obsolete and primordial political narrative that is created by new rising elites, but rather a modern and seductive manifestation of powerful dynamics. This intersection of nationalist and religious tropes, as shown earlier through posters and other images, feeds off territoriality, defined as the defense of a land and the political use of geography, and belonging, through the use of selective memory and the creation of narrative arcs that involve a supposed golden era then decay, crisis, salvation, and rebirth.

69
Michel Yunus, "Qiṣṣah niḍāl rawwat arḍ al-arz" [The story of a fight for the land of the cedars], Lebanese-forces.com, July 20, 2021, accessed October 9, 2022, https://www.lebanese-forces.com/2021/07/20/christian-struggle-lebanon/.

70
Heyberger, "Saint Charbel Makhlouf, ou la consécration de l'identité maronite."

71
Bruno Lefort, "Répresentations du leadership et memoires vives chez les militants aounistes," in *Leaders et partisans au Liban*, ed. Franck Mermier and Sabrina Mervin (Paris: Karthala, 2012), 219–62.

72
Michel Aoun served as President of Lebanon between October 31, 2016, and October 30, 2022. He was previously the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, a party affiliated with the "8 March" coalition.

73
Philippe Abirached, "Charisme, pouvoir et communauté politique : la figure de Michel Aoun," in *Leaders et partisans au Liban*, ed. Franck Mermier and Sabrina Mervin (Paris: Karthala, 2012), 33–55.

74
Hinnerk Bruhns, "Le charisme en politique : idée seduisante ou concept pertinent ?", *Cahiers du Centre de recherches historiques* 24 (2000).

75
M. Asım Karaömerlioğlu, "The Role of Religion and Geography in Turkish Nationalism: The Case of Nurettin Topçu," in *Spatial Conceptions of the Nation: Modernizing Geographies in Greece and Turkey*, ed. P. Nikiforos Diamandouros, Thalia Dragonas and Çağlar Keyder (London: I. B: Tauris, 2010), 93–109.

Conclusion

In Lebanon, within the current sectarian political system and social paradigm, Christian nationalism appears as a wide spectrum of discourses and practices that ostensibly aim at defending the national identity and the political integrity of Lebanon. These discourses and practices thereby continue to define the sense of belonging to the nation and its history along sectarian lines (in this case, being Christian).

Religiously infused images and symbols play a central role in the fruition and circulation of all these Christian nationalist discourses. Themes taken from the Ancient Testament, the Gospels, or the cult of saints in local traditions and devotional practices are powerfully deployed in three main domains: the celebration of local geography (space), the celebration of local history (time), and the celebration of the connection between the group and its leader (emotional community-building).

One of the limits of much of the existing literature on sectarianism and sectarianization in Lebanon is, in my opinion, its more or less conscious appeal to Lebanese exceptionalism, as if the political developments in the country were something unique and bizarre. Even when the theoretical premises are different, this assumption of Lebanese exceptionalism ends up reinforcing primordialist understandings of the country's history, identities, and identity politics.[76]

When we look at Lebanon's sectarian politics not as an exceptional local phenomenon predicated on primordial identities and topographies, but rather as an assemblage of different political doctrines, as well as an entanglement between religious identities, nationalism, capitalist modernization, class conflict, and formation of new elites, we have the opportunity to develop a more nuanced analysis of Lebanese history, with the chance to stimulate an enriching conversation with the histories of nationalisms and identity-building processes in post-Ottoman territories such as Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus.

I think, among many other examples, at the category of Muslim nationalism provided by Zürcher in his analysis of the political vocabulary of Turkey's early republican leadership, whose definition of nationhood was still defined and gatekept along religious lines in the early 1920s;[77] or at the nexus between religion and nationalism in the *Türk-İslam sentezi* doctrine of the late 1970s in Turkey's right-wing milieus;[78] or at the combination of Zionist nationalism and Orthodox Judaism in the *Tziyonut datit* (Religious Zionism) and the *dati leumi* ("religious national") political camp in Israel.[79]

The power of the intersection of religious imagery and nationalism, as this article aimed to show, and the heuristic relevance of its study lies in the fact that it helps to explain the inconsistencies of nationalist and sectarian discourses.[80]

The map of the imagined community and its political structure can change over time, and its leaders can change tactics and alliances. What ultimately matters is the utopian and redemptive character of the nationalist project, its sacralization of land, and the tension between doom and rebirth that founds the mobilizational dimension of politics.

Whether through the ubiquitous reference to the Cross, the Passion of Christ, or other established Christian iconography, the religious images in the Lebanese Christian nationalist discourse reinforce a utopian dimension and establish a parallelism between the Christian constituency and its leaders, on the one hand, and Jesus Christ, on the other. The images

76
Rosita Di Peri, Francesco Mazzucotelli, *Guida alla politica mediorientale* (Milano: Mondadori Università, 2021), 49–56.

77
Erik-Jan Zürcher, "The Vocabulary of Muslim Nationalism," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 137 (1999), 81–92.

78
Banu Eligür, *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 93–134.

79
Ezra Kopelowitz, "Religious Politics and Israel's Ethnic Democracy," *Israel Studies* 6, no. 3 (2001): 166–90.

80
Anastasia Stouraiti, Alexander Kazamias, "The Imaginary Topographies of the *Megali Idea*: National Territory as Utopia," in *Spatial Conceptions of the Nation: Modernizing Geographies in Greece and Turkey*, ed. P. Nikiforos Diamandouros, Thalia Dragonas and Çağlar Keyder (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 161–80.

that were discussed in this article do not merely have an aesthetic value; they produce meanings, and are meant to reinforce the connection with the land, as well as the legitimacy of the leader, portrayed as the savior, founder, and binder of the community. Religious images provide a powerful device of legitimization and mobilization, even when they can be manipulative and used instrumentally for narrow political purposes that might very well be at odds with the actual content of the messages and core beliefs of the corresponding religion.

"Cosmic Religion" and Apocalyptic Elements in New Hungarian National Mythologies

László-Attila Hubbes

Centro Studi
di Civiltà e Spiritualità
Comparate
fondazione
Giorgio Cini onlus

László-Attila Hubbes
"Sapientia" Hungarian University of Transylvania
hubbeslaszlo@uni.sapientia.ro

Keywords:
"Cosmic religion," Hungarian neo-mythologies, Ethnogenesis, Ancient aliens, Apocalypticism, Conspirituality, Cultic milieu, Social media, Digital media

To cite this:
Hubbes, László-Attila. " 'Cosmic Religion' and Apocalyptic Elements in New Hungarian National Mythologies." *Religiographies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2023): 122–142.

Abstract

The article presents a comparative case study on Hungarian traditional and digital media narratives linking new national mythologies to the cultic and apocalyptic milieu. It focuses on those imaginary elements that refer to other-worldly, pre-human, and/or extraterrestrial beings that play an essential role in the ethnogenesis and eschatological narratives of various interrelated new mythologies of nationalistic, religious, spiritual, conspiracist, and alternative (pseudo-/para-)scientific environments, as seen through their representations in the media. How do these elements (originating from ancient mythologies and contemporary global popular culture) *interfere* with national ideologies and religious beliefs? The main questions are how these "ancient and apocalyptic aliens" play an active role in the reinvented origin stories of the Hungarian nation, and whether they interlink the beginnings and the millennial views of the future.

His sacred mission: to erase the Roman Empire, establish the Heavenly kingdom from one ocean to the other; His sacred instrument: the Heavenly sword.
The Mission of our king Attila (Miklós Szedlacsik)

Raving (hi)stories?

Back in early spring 2017, while preparing a paper on alien-related beliefs (and apocalypticism) for a conference dedicated to the topic of the stranger, a couple of days before the academic event I stumbled upon an advertisement[1] from the Hungarian Open Academy of the PPH (Problem Prevention International Holding for Competence Development, Coaching and Leader Training). The ad offered a free introductory course on lifestyle enhancement and self-management. The video course demo came with a stunning title: "Intervention from Heaven: Heavenly 'technical' help for our King Attila" superimposed on a colourful picture (Fig. 1) of a futuristic megalopolis with skyscrapers, space jets, and a giant planet lurking among the purple clouds. I was shocked, confused, and nevertheless curious. But alas, the video was available only upon registration, after receiving a code sent by e-mail by the secretary of the Open Academy. I didn't receive my reply until after the conference. Thus, in my paper I had to deal with this promising piece of information as an inexorable mystery left only to my guesswork. However, the video lived up to my expectations even after the conference had ended. An entire mythology unfolded in it, rich with teachings on morality, present and past depravity of society, angelic beings of higher and lower spiritual vibration frequencies living in the inner spaces of the Earth, mysterious lost continents and civilisations, extra-terrestrial aliens and spacecrafts, the hidden and forbidden prehistory of the Magyar (Hungarian) peoples all over the globe, the sacred eschatological

1 Accessed 2nd September 2017, http://nyiltakademia.hu/hu/tudas-coach-kepzes-szedlacsikmiklos-tanoda-problempreventionholding-pph-hunortrade-boldogelet.

Fig. 1. "Intervention from Heaven – Heavenly 'technical' help for our King Attila," article illustration (http://nyiltakademia.hu/hu/tudas-coach-kepzes-szedlacsikmiklos-tanoda-problempreventionholding-pph-hunortrade-boldogelet).

mission of Hungarians to save and heal the world under the guidance of the heavenly guardians, and of course, among these, the heavenly technical help provided for King Attila of the Huns in his historical task of eradicating the rotten evil Roman empire. I saved the link to the video for later study.[2]

As might be presumed from this introductory anecdote, the aim of this study is to present and interpret beliefs regarding extra-terrestrial alien interventions in the (pre)history and (eschatologic) future of Hungarians, as they appear in new national mythologies in the context of the contemporary cultic milieu of vernacular religiosity, alternative prehistory, ethnopaganism, New Age spirituality, UFO lore, conspiracy mentality, apocalyptic discourses, and secular millennialism. The question arises still as to how it is even possible to link these seemingly unrelated fields and topics. They do not even form part of the mainstream culture, and many might consider them irrelevant fringe beliefs, ravings, and nonsensical curiosities. Why study them, why bother with them at all? The fact is, they are neither as irrelevant, nor as fringe, nor as ridiculous, and not even as unrelated to each other as they may seem. To various extents, these motifs all deeply permeate different segments of contemporary popular culture, often intersecting and overlapping each other.[3] They constitute an extensive, multifaceted, and very complex eclectic, syncretic contemporary mythology. Tabloids and social media have their own considerable contribution to the formation of this global neomythology.[4]

By using the term "mythology" I have not the slightest intent of making a statement about the validity and truth values of their content;[5] it simply refers to the fact that these are narratives that describe and explain reality for their adherents. Mythology presents itself as a key term in approaching the topic under discussion, because it implies, beyond the narrative lines, a well-defined structure, a common archetypal scheme, comparable symbolic figures and categories.[6] Myth analysis provides one of the best ways to study how certain motifs and topics emerge, resurface, change, and come to dominate given world views and attitudes. As a researcher of contemporary mythologies, myth hermeneutics is offering me a helping hand to arrive at an unbiased interpretation of very sensitive national discourses.

The mythological approach allows us to perform an objective study of the Hungarian new national mythology. Impartiality and objectivity are essential, especially taking into account the fact that academics themselves play an important part in these modern myths: they are often seen as *evil antagonists* plotting to suppress the truth about the real origin, identity, and predestination of the nation.[7]

2
In the meantime, the video disappeared from its original hyperlink, and so did the initial ad. Thus, the link in the footnote above leads to the present website of the Open Academy. The video is now available here: Szedlacsik Miklós, "Attila királyunk küldetése" (The mission of our King Attila), in YouTube Channel *Szedlacsik Miklós Nyílt Akadémia vezetője*, 29th March 2017, accessed 2th September 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=62&v=-25ljw0kX9DU.

3
See Adrian Ivakhiv, "Occult geographies, or the promises of spectres: Scientific knowledge, political trust, and religious vision at the margins of the modern," in *Orpheus' Glance: Selected Papers on Process Psychology: The Fontareches Meetings, 2002–2017*, ed. Paul Stenner and Michel Weber (Louvain-la-Neuve: Les Éditions Chromatika, 2018), 115–44, 116.

4
For the definition and discussion of neomythology see the section below.

5
As Hexham and Poewe put it, the essence of a myth is not its rational validity or trueness, but its function: "What makes a story a myth is not its content, as the rationalists thought, but the use to which the story is put. The success of the myth depends upon the belief of people in the truth of the story and the relevance of the way it interprets their social reality. Questions of historic, philosophic, or any other verifiable truths are unimportant in the creation of mythologies. What matters is the power of myths to inspire belief and to enable believers to make sense of their experience." See Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, *Understanding Cults and New Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 25–26, accessed 3rd April 2023, https://www.academia.edu/987663/Understanding_Cults_and_New_Religions. According to Arvidsson myth, as opposed to science, offers a sentimentally livable world model; Stefan Arvidsson, "Aryan mythology as science and ideology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67, no. 2 (1999): 327–54, accessed 3rd April 2023, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1465740.

6
Ágnes Kapitány and Gábor Kapitány, "A modern mitológiák elemzésének kérdései" (Questions related to the analysis of modern mythologies), *Replika* 80 (2012): 9–27.

7
See the closing citations of this study.

Old and new mythologies

Before turning to the presentation of the myths themselves, however, it is important to distinguish between traditional and new mythology. This discrepancy can be deduced from the world view implied in the last sentence of the introductory thoughts, which highlights one essential difference between classical myths (or myths according to the classical definition)[8] and modern myths (constituting the realm of neomythology). By investigating the concept of truth in ancient as well as more recent narratives, we may reach to a better understanding of the role played by knowledge—the different forms of it and those who master or lack it. While classical myths simply *revealed* the Truth (through forms of knowledge transmitted by divine channels), newer myths present an apologetic stance: they *defend* the truth, *contesting* academic science, often using the methods of scientific argumentation. It is not only the case that science delimits itself from myth based on the opposition of rational and irrational; contemporary mythical thinking also reflects on and dissociates itself from conventional science. According to Ágnes and Gábor Kapitány, the latter attitude reflects a sense of crisis:

> "One of the most typical reactions in times of crisis is a *return* to the socio-cultural paradigm before (or outside of) the ways of thinking that have been plunged into crisis. On the one hand, in order to revitalise the tired socio-cultural system through fertilising, 'extra-systemic' effects, and on the other hand, by recognising that the system is becoming discontinuous in the way it is, this inevitably brings with it a questioning of its fundamental premises. If the dominance of rational-scientific thinking has rendered mythological thinking obsolete, in a crisis situation it is precisely this other approach that is being brought to the fore, calling into question and invalidating the previous judgement of rational-scientific thinking that had downgraded mythological thinking."[9,10]

The opportunity to create new myths is offered by gaps in knowledge and the need to find a coherent deeper universal explanation.[11] These gaps are caused either by a lack of information or by lack of understanding, both leading to the rejection of traditional, conventional views.[12]

Kapitány and Kapitány also call attention to the fact that these new myths are expressions of a crisis of identity[13] (on both an individual and societal level). If we take into account that the narratives at the core of our investigation are concerned with the past (more precisely the ethnogenesis) of the Hungarians—and their future fate—then we may assume that they are representations of a crisis of national identity in the context of the recent major global and geopolitical paradigm changes. The central issue of Truth in the case of new national mythology is history. The Greek scholar Ioannis Xidakis stresses that in new myths, conventional science is either dismissed as being incapable of providing answers or regarded as hostile, and conventional knowledge of history is rejected as being indifferent,[14] from which follows an urge to question and reformulate history, based on a perceived "freedom" "to interpret it from the very beginning, to rewrite it and to adapt it to their own world view."[15]

World view brings in another question: that of conviction. Myths, including new myths, are not only narratives; in order to function as valid world explanations and models for life, they require faith. A long line of social and human scientists from Malinowski, and Durkheim, Weber, Frazer, Boas, Turner, Van Gennep, Cassirer, Lévi-Strauss, Eliade, Kerényi,

8
To cite just one example: Geoffrey Stephen Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

9
Kapitány and Kapitány, "A modern mitológiák," 12.

10
All translations from Hungarian are by the author. In some longer, rather difficult cases I have used the help of the www.DeepL.com/Translator, accessed 3rd April 2023 (free version).

11
Kapitány and Kapitány, "A modern mitológiák."

12
It is important to note here that in the Hungarian new national mythologies, adherents position themselves against and emphasise their opposition towards the official teachings of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, especially in the fields of history, prehistory, linguistics, and ethnology. This means the total rejection of belonging to the Finno-Ugric language family and total denial of any ethnogenic liaisons with present or historical Uralic or Siberian peoples. Instead, the central thread of the different mythic narrative variants is woven around the Turanic (Turkic) nature of the Hungarian nation, with a historical continuity from the Sumerians through the Scythians, Parthians, Huns, Avars to the Magyars, topped with a multi-millennial continuity (of as much as 40,000 years) in the Carpathian Basin.

13
Kapitány and Kapitány, "A modern mitológiák."

14
Ioannis Xidakis, "Neomythology: A new religious mythology," *Religions* 13, no. 6 (2022): 536, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13060536, making reference to Hexham and Poewe, *Understanding*.

15
Xidakis, "Neomythology," 6.

Kirk, and Geertz, to Jung or Durand (to name only some of them) have shown the strong interconnections and interdependencies between myth and religion. On the other hand, modern secularisation, the disenchantment of the world going hand in hand with the hegemony of science has brought in the need for scientific plausibility. Scholars like Wouter Hanegraaff and Christopher Partridge discuss the scientific nature of modern occultism—the contemporary myths and religions appearing in scientific disguise, as alternative or fringe sciences.[16] New mythologies and New Age spirituality are characterised by this ambivalence in the foundation of their world views. Based on the idea of "cosmotheism" elaborated by Stelios Papalexandropoulos,[17] Ioannis Xidakis states that due to the secularisation of the divine, and its identification and restriction to the realm of the physical world, in the diffused religiosity of neomythology, expressions of secular elements, supernatural heroes, extra-terrestrial creatures (angels, gods, space beings, etc.), discussions about the existence of other dimensions, a higher form of the self, their powers, and the magical and supernatural appearance of these beings and situations undergo "scientification." In other words, they are explained in logical, "scientific" terms, and they always identify with physical space and its elements.[18]

Discussing the investigated narratives as "new national mythologies"—beyond the simple fact that they do not belong to the complex of the ancient heritage of the Hungarian culture, and in their present forms they are definitely rather recent creations constituting modern myths[19]—is precisely what is referred to in this process of "scientification." Keeping in mind the characteristics described above by Xidakis,[20] as we will see, the referred narratives—showing aspects of both religiosity and scientific ambition—converge into a "cosmotheistic"[21] neomythology.

We may best understand the newest developments emerging in the mythical narratives concerning the past and future of the nation within the framework of the mentioned "cosmotheism." However disparate, unrelated, or even contradictory and mutually exclusive the motives and topics of these myths may seem, they ultimately assemble into loose clusters and nebulae revolving around the mystical idea of the nation. They form a magical, yet rationally, scientifically explainable universe, in which every little aspect elevates the Hungarians to a cosmic importance, both as regards their ethnogenesis (with ancestors coming from the stars) and their eschatologic role in the future (with leaders returning from distant astral spheres to guide humanity). Altogether, we can witness the emergence of a "cosmic religion."

Cosmic Religion?

The idea of "cosmic" has been appearing with increasing frequency in religious or spiritual contexts, as we could see in the case of Papalexandropoulos' "cosmotheism," but we can encounter it in other contemporary expressions such as "Cosmicism,"[22] "Russian Cosmism,"[23] "Cosmic Visions,"[24] "Cosmic Consciousness,"[25] and even the term "Cosmic Religion"[26] by none other than Albert Einstein. The fascination with the Cosmos seems to have re-penetrated the religious mind from the realm of the advancing scientific interest of modern times.[27]

Before presenting a general picture of the Hungarian national neomythologies, we should take a moment and explain the concept of "Cosmic religion." I have chosen this expression to refer to the growing number

16
See Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Wouter Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West. Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture*, 2 vols. (London: T&T Clark International, 2004–2005). Also see Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, *New Religions as Global Cultures: Making the Human Sacred* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1997).

17
Stelios Papalexandropoulos, "Νε΄α Εποχ ΄η: Η θρησκειολογικ ΄η ταυτότητα ενός κιν ΄ηματος (δε ΄υτερο με΄ρος)," part 2 (New Age: The religious identity of a movement), *Exodos* 1992, 7: 41–61, referred to by Xidakis, "Neomythology," 10.

18
Xidakis, "Neomythology," 10.

19
In defining a classification of the myths encountered today, Ágnes and Gábor Kapitány distinguish four myth types: 1. ancient myths living on unchanged; 2. ancient myths surviving in a modified form (which can already be regarded a modernised myth); 3. analogies of ancient myths taking on a new form (undeniably modern myths, which are related in many aspects with older myths); and 4. entirely newly created modern myths (most specifically, the anti-modern myths, created as—essentially negative—answers to modernity). See Ágnes Kapitány and Gábor Kapitány, "A modern mitológiák szemiotikájához," ([Contributions] To the semiotics of modern mythologies) in *Már a múlt sem a régi . . . Az új magyar mitológia multidiszciplináris elemzése*, ed. László Hubees and IstvánPovedák (Szeged: MAKAT—MoMiMű, 2015), 39–60, 41–43. The narratives of the Hungarian national neomythology, though bearing some characteristics of the second type, sometimes even emphasising their authentic ancient nature, belong exclusively to the last category of entirely newly created modern myths.

20
Xidakis, "Neomythology."

21
Papalexandropoulos, "Νε΄α Εποχ ΄η."

22
See the arguments related to the Cosmicism of H. P. Lovecraft's Chthulhu universe in Brian Johnson, "Prehistories of posthumanism: Cosmic indifferentism, alien genesis, and ecology from H. P. Lovecraft to Ridley Scott," in *The Age of Lovecraft*, ed. Carl H. Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 97–116.

23
See Baasabjav Terbish, "Russian Cosmism: Alien visitations and cosmic energies in contemporary Russia," *Modern Asian Studies* 54, no. 3 (2020): 759–94, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X17001123.

24
See Albert A. Harrison, *Starstruck: Cosmic Visions in Science, Religion, and Folklore* (New York: Berghahn

Books, 2007).

25
See Camille Paglia, "Cults and cosmic consciousness: Religious vision in the American 1960s," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 10, no. 3 (2003): 57–111.

26
Albert Einstein, *Einstein on Cosmic Religion, and Other Opinions and Aphorisms*, with an appraisal by George Bernard Shaw (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2009 [first published 1934]).

27
Although an essential question, it would far exceed the scope and limits of present article to take a deeper inventory and interpret the "cosmic" in modern religiosity. Harrison's work referred to earlier: *Starstruck* is dedicated to such an endeavour in an American context. Also see Andrew Fergus Wilson, "Postcards from the cosmos: Cosmic spaces in alternative religion and conspiracy theories," *The Journal of Astrosociology* 2 (2017): 133–49.

28
Robert Pearson Flaherty, "Extraterrestrial/UFO Religion," in C*ritical Dictionary of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements*, ed. James Crossley and Alastair Lockhart, accessed 15th January 2021, www.cdamm.org/articles/extraterrestrial.

29
Einstein, *Cosmic religion,* 54–55.

30
A thorough, though controversial overview of these ancient astral and solar myths is offered by Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill: An Essay Investigating the Origins of Human Knowledge and Its Transmission Through Myth* (Boston: Gambit, 1969).

31
See Paul von Ward, *We've Never Been Alone: A History of Extraterrestrial Intervention* (Hampton: Roads Publishing, 2011).

32
Johnson, "Prehistories"; also see M. V. Lakshmi Reddy, " 'Cosmicism' the true eternal theism: Realising the supreme cosmic reality through basic cosmic education for global adults," *Indian Journal of Adult Education* 76, no. 4 (2015): 15–32.

of extraterrestrial elements in such new mythic narratives: ancient aliens from the stars, palaeoastronautics or palaeocontacts, "transformation" of ancient deities and angelic or demonic entities into extraterrestrial visitors, reinterpretation of historical personalities as aliens, the occult, hermetic and New Age conceptions about astral planes, UFO beliefs, conspiracy theories about flying saucer accidents that have been kept secret, hidden lunar bases and shapeshifter reptilians, reports of close encounters and physical or oniric raptures, visits to highly advanced extraterrestrial civilisations on distant planets, millennial or apocalyptic convictions concerning galactic saviours and cosmic guardians, and similar contemporary ideas from the frontiers of the fantastic.

It is also important to point out that these ideas do not emerge out of the blue: they are organically both the results of and inspirations for the Cosmic Age dawning over the course of the last century—rocket science, space explorations, lunar expeditions and Martian probes, prospects of interplanetary travel, the SETI programme hunting for radio signals from light years away, and the Pioneer and Voyager plaques sent as messages to possible extraterrestrial intelligent life forms. We should also not forget the vast number of science fiction stories, growing on the foundation of the equally modern myth of human progress. Additionally, we should stress the religious or mythic nature of these topics. On the one hand, although they are often presented as archaeological and astronomical discoveries, sometimes even elaborated in the form of scientific theses, they cannot break out from the realm of parascientific theories and personal convictions. Spiritual world views count more heavily than the verifiability of facts and the strict methodologies of scientific research. On the other hand, however science fiction deals with these same topics and narratives, the creators of those universes consciously remain in the realm of fantasy, without claiming the status of reality for their works. Nevertheless, one should acknowledge the reciprocal impact between science fiction and cosmic mythologies. What differentiates them is in the case of the latter, is the firm belief in the various narratives about cosmic aliens and most often also attitudes, actions, and even rituals expressing or supporting those beliefs.[28]

As a last differentiation, I would like to distinguish the present notion of "Cosmic religion" from other similar concepts. In the first place, I have to dissociate it from Albert Einstein's conception of "cosmic religious sense," which he proposes as a third phase of religiosity after the "religion of fear" and "social-moral religion," identifying it as the strongest and noblest driving force behind scientific research.[29] Cosmic sense and cosmic elements, however, have always been part of traditional mythologies too, forming the foundations of religions with an astrological substratum: personified stars, planets, and other celestial bodies or cosmic beings originating from the heavenly spheres play essential roles in the classical astral myths and religious cosmologies of ancient peoples all around the world.[30] The contemporary narratives of cosmic beings rely much more on modern knowledge (even when denying or dismissing sciences) and modern imagination (especially science fiction), and they usually reinterpret old myths, legends, and history as the interventions of extraterrestrial beings.[31]

Our term "Cosmic religion" should be distinguished also from "Cosmicism" or "cosmic indifferentism," the literary philosophy expressed by H. P. Lovecraft in his fictional *Chthulhu* universe,[32] a kind of non-religious

existential nihilism on a cosmic scale, where the emphasis is laid on the insignificance or meaninglessness of humanity related to the vastness of cosmos and related to the terrible creatures populating it.

A distinction should be made from the spiritual-ideological philosophy of Russian "Cosmism" as well, representing the opposite attitude: that of human bravery in conquering the cosmos, which—based on the ideas of Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, Alexander Bogdanov, and other Russian scientists—envisaged human expansion beyond the atmosphere of the Earth in the near future and believed this expansion would entail a radical transformation in human consciousness and in relations between humanity and the universe.[33] Several ideas from Russian Cosmism have infiltrated also into the new national mythologies.

33
Natalija Majsova, "The cosmic subject in post-Soviet Russia: Noocosmology, space-oriented spiritualism, and the problem of the securitization of the soul," in *Cultural and Political Imaginaries in Putin's Russia*, ed. Niklas Bernsand and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, Eurasian Studies Library 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 232–58, 233, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004366671_012, as well as Terbish, "Russian Cosmism." See also Albert A. Harrison "Russian and American Cosmism: Religion, national psyche, and spaceflight," *Astropolitics* 11, no. 1–2 (2013): 25–44, https://doi.org/10.1080/14777622.2013.801719.

A short inventory of myths

> "The ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Mayan traditions all mention the Sirius connection, that their first kings came to Earth from here. Taking this further, the idea emerged in Hungary that Hungarians also have something to do with the brightest star in the sky. The Sirian origin of the ancient river cultures, specifically of the Sumerians, was first proclaimed by an American spiritual writer, Zecharia Sitchin, whose ideas were later accepted by others. This indeed has real grounds in religious history: according to Mesopotamian myths, the first kings came to Earth from a planet of a distant star. The entire Sirius cult seems to be part of a common ancestral tradition. And given that this common 'Sirius-centric' world view is found mainly in the ancient river civilisations, and since there are numerous indications that the latter are related to Hungarians in origin and language, it can be concluded that the mythical ancestral kings of the Middle East who came from Sirius are also the ancestors of the Hungarians."[34]

34
Erőss, Diána, "A Szíriusz népe" (The people of Sirius), *Hihetetlen! Magazin. A magyarság 20.000 éves történelme* 4 (2017): 5–8, 5.

35
Due to the great popularity of the topic, to date, five consecutive special issues on the same topic have been published, both in print and online, under the same thematic title: *A magyarság 20.000 éves történelme* (20,000 years of Hungarian history)—the first in 2012, then in 2013, 2015, 2017, and most recently in 2020—each containing on average 195 pages.

36
Important to note: the question marks denote actual rhetorical questions; the implied answer is always "yes."

This is the introduction of the first of a series of articles published in the fourth special issue dedicated to "20,000 years of Hungarian history" of the Hungarian popular tabloid *Hihetetlen! Magazin* (Unbelievable! Magazine).[35] It beautifully sums up the essential changes that characterise many present-day Hungarian ethnogenesis myths. The titles of articles, chapters, and subchapters in this series speak for themselves; to highlight just some of them: "Ancient kings from Sirius: The cradle of Turanian civilisation?",[36] "Rulers on thundering ships," "Hunor and Magyar, the Sirius-twins?", "Are we descendants of amphibian beings?", "Extraterrestrial ancestral kings of Atlantis," "Venusians on Earth"; "Táltos-training in another dimension," "The shepherd boy and the luminescent alien"; "Secrets of the Sumerian king lists: The heavenly ancestors of the Árpád dynasty," "Etana, the first astronaut?", "The peoples of the Chineai planet (Hungarians, Japanese, Chinese, and Ainu)." This is only a fragmentary selection from a single series of articles in a single issue of the *Unbelievable! Magazine*. With a very summary review, the list can be completed from the four additional article series in the same publication ("Nimrod's sky-scraping throne-tower," "Nimrod transformed into dragon"), and titles of chapters or articles from four other issues: "Our Cosmic origins" "The ancestors of Hungarians arrived on Earth with thundering, shining ships," "Did we arrive on Earth from Sirius?", "There's a long way to Earth: The legend of our astral

origin," "We are the survivors of the previous humanity: Thundering, shining heavenly ships," "Our ancestral land, Atlantis," "The legend of the miraculous hind: Herald of another dimension?", "Disguised aliens," "The truth of the Arvisuras," "Giant monsters or cosmic warriors? The mysterious Gog and Magog," "Apocalyptic purgatory," "The round-headed people: (Amphibian) Vegetarians versus meat eaters," "The burning star and the destruction of Mu," "Teacher from under the sea," "The speaking stones of the Holy Crown: Mysterious transceiver device?" (first issue: 2012), "The alien gods of the ancient Magyars," "Fiery miracles, heavenly battles," "Our holy relic (the Holy Crown), a cosmic transceiver?" (second issue: 2013), "The cosmic religion of our ancestors," "An army arriving on the path of stars" (third issue: 2015), and similar titles and topics, which are replete with (rhetorical) questions. The listing could go on from Attila's people in Tibet, the Uighurs and ancient Huns in China and the Swiss Alps, the Himalayan Hungarian shamans, the Scythian pharaohs of Egypt, Hungarians in the Bible, the ancient Hungarian esoterism, with reincarnation, yoga, and chakra teachings, up to the Hungarian Pilis-mountains (pyramids) as the heart chakra of the world.

One might say that taking into account the nature of the magazine: a tabloid, it is obvious that such sensational, bombastic themes proliferate, but still, they accurately reflect both the multicoloured mythology inhabiting the popular imagination and the avid hunger of the public[37] for these narratives. On the other hand, the magazine only concentrates the mythic material of hundreds of publications and dozens of websites already inundating the Hungarian media market over the last three decades, building up a new, more up-to-date mythology that meets the needs and interest of a contemporary audience.

In order to understand the nature of this change it is necessary to point to the previous, more traditional modern mythic paradigms concerning early Hungarian history. While in the medieval chronicles and folk tradition Hungarians were linked generally with the Scythian, Hunnic, and Turkic tribes, during the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries there were efforts to reconstruct a presumably lost national mythology, and in parallel, joining in the European scientific developments, scholarly research worked on the historical, ethnographic, and linguistic investigation of the origins and affiliation of the Hungarian language and people. Studying language patterns and elements, prominent linguists of the era (József Budenz, Pál Hunfalvy) demonstrated the similarities between Hungarian and Finnish, Estonian, Mordvin, Mansi, Khanti, Mari, Lapp, and Samoyed (labelled together as Finno-Ugric or Uralic) languages, while others (Ármin Vámbéry, Gábor Bálint Szentkatolnai) discovered affinities with Asian (Turkic, Caucasian) languages. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the scientific rational methodologies, paired by nationalistic fervour, led to heavy linguistic-historical debates known as the academic "Ugric-Turkic War," following which the official academic doctrines definitively rejected the theory of Scythian-Hun-Turkic-Hungarian continuity.[38] This standpoint left many adepts of this latter view deeply frustrated and (in the extra-academic circles) led to the consolidation of a partly scientific, partly mythic counter-discourse: the rather political *Turanism*[39] movement.

While the romantic ideology of Turanism: the brotherhood of Turanian nations (Turkic, Mongolian, even—in the case of pan-Turanism—Finnic, Uralic, and Japanese peoples) appeared already in the nineteenth century, the Hungarian Turanism rose to major political influence in the first half of the twentieth century.[40] It was the vessel and expression of

37
I could not find exact numbers regarding the numbers of copies printed of these special issues, but they can be estimated to number in the thousands, with reprinted issues in several cases, and a high demand for antiquarian copies in online bookstores. The YouTube channel (accessed 3rd April 2023, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChVjF6nIrI2N7I-6vWQ66Lnw) of the *Hihetetlen! Magazin* has more than 53K subscribers, the Facebook profile of the magazine (accessed 3rd April 2023, https://www.facebook.com/HihetetlenMagazin) has over 117K followers, while the seven talk-show video versions of the printed special issues (each around one hour) have reached between 10,000 and 93,000 views each.

38
Summarising from László-Attila Hubbes, "Ancient voices: A contrastive study of Romanian and Hungarian ethno-pagan blogs on the Net," in *The Role of New Media in Journalism: Conference Proceedings*, ed. Ruxandra Boicu, Georgeta Drulă and Luminiţa Roşca (Bucureşti: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, 2011), 181–206.

39
Ádám Kolozsi, *Social Constructions of the Native Faith: Mytho-historical Narratives and Identity-discourse in Hungarian Neo-Paganism* (master's thesis, CEU Budapest, 2012).

40
As a political ideology, (pan-)Turanism was also a response to the rising European nationalisms within the pan-Germanic and pan-Slavic movements of the era. See Kolozsi, *Social constructions*, 43–44.

a newly unfolding, modern national mythology, in which the Hungarians, descendants and brothers of the ancient nomadic steppe cultures of Central Asia, appear in idealised, heroic colours as a powerful warrior nation of colonisers conquering medieval Europe.

Aside Turanism, there was a lesser, but still influential trend in the interbellum period that followed James Churchward's diffusionist works on the mysterious proto-culture of the lost continent of Mu.[41] Some authors, like József Cserép and Jenő Csicsáki, chose instead of or beside the Turanian Turkic people none less honourable ancestors: the ancient Mayans of America, who were descendants of the peoples of the lost continents of Atlantis, Mu, or Lemuria.[42]

Although the mythic under-layer of Turanism (and "Lemurianism") already contained ideas of racial superiority and primacy together with elements of esoteric mysticism, the next phase of new national "protochronistic"[43] mythology evolved in the post-Second World War period, mainly in the Western Hungarian dissident circles. Authors like the émigré Ferenc Badiny Jós, Tibor Baráth, Ida Bobula, and Viktor Padányi have proposed a Sumerian and Parthian ancestry for Hungarians. This Sumerianism evolved to engulf almost all anti-Finno-Ugric trends. Beyond that, many such works represent genuine protochronistic ideas of Hungarian primacy in every aspect of civilisation: the first proto-language, from which all other languages evolved, the invention of writing, the invention of horse-riding, the idea of geographical first presence and continuity in the Carpathian-Danubian area, and also of being the high proto-culture —contemporary or related to the Atlanteans, Lemurians, or Hyperboreans— from which other nations diverged and degenerated from it.[44] This mythology involved a strong aspect of religiosity ranging from the Scythian pre-Christian Christianity and Parthian provenance of Jesus through Manichaean light-Gnosticism to astral Shamanism, all contributing to the formation of various contemporary Christian-Pagan syncretisms and Hungarian Ethnopagan movements.[45]

In the second half of the past century, and especially towards the turn of the millennium, new developments emerged in Hungarian national neomythologies. Extraterrestrial beings started to appear ever more often as ethnic ancestors, watching guardians, and future cosmic redeemers. In some cases, pre-human deities, other-worldly spirits, and totemic heroes of earlier classical ethnogenesis myths gradually turn into extraterrestrial aliens, and so do certain prospective messianic figures from newer narratives.[46] These changes, however, do not take place as independent phenomena. They reflect and adapt to contemporary global mythopoeic processes. In the narratives we have investigated, new national mythologies merge with internationally circulating contemporary stories of ancient aliens. In the most recent developments, the extraterrestrial beings appearing in new ethnic myths of prehistory or future national destiny may take up apocalyptic or millennial aspects. Considering the rampant presence of such topics both in print and online, the influence of global (and local) subcultural tabloid media on emergent national mythologies seems incontestable.

One of the most distinctive myths, and the earliest one showing such influences, is Zoltán Paál's *Arvisura*,[47] which not only brings together prehistoric ethnogenesis with deities of Siberian-Ugrian mythology and ancient extraterrestrial astronauts from the Sirius, but also tells of multiple apocalyptic global cataclysms in the distant past that annihilated Atlantis and *Ataisz* continents.[48] Most of the newer mythic discourses stem

41
James Churchward's most famous works *The Lost Continent of Mu* (New York: W. E. Rudge, 1926), *The Children of Mu* (New York: Washburn, 1931), and *Cosmic Forces as They Were Taught in Mu: The Ancient Tale that Religion and Science are Twin Sisters,* 2 vols. (New York: printed by author, 1934-35).

42
József Cserép, *A magyarok eredete: A turáni népek őshazája és ókori történetek* (The origin of the Hungarians: The ancestral homeland of the Turanian peoples and ancient stories) (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1925); József Cserép, *A magyarok őshazája és őstörténete. Madya. Lemuria és Atlantisz a médok, pannonok, feniciek, etruszkok őshona és az embrei kultúra bölcsője* (The ancestral land and prehistory of Hungarians: Lemuria and Atlantis, the ancestral land of Medes, Pannonians, Phoenicians, Etruscans and the cradle of human culture) (Budapest: Lampel, 1933); Jenő Csicsáki, *Mu, az emberiség szülőföldje* (Mu, the ancestral land of humanity) (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1938) Jenő Csicsáky, *A magyar nemzetcsalád útja Távol Nyugatról a Távol Keletig,* (The way of the Hungarian nation-family from the Far West to the Far East) (Sydney: Hungaria Publishing Company, 1961).

43
Although the term "protochronism" originated from the Romanian literary historian Edgar Papu, from 1974, the phenomenon of radical ethnocentrism, of ethnic or racial primacy and superiority denoted by it, can be recognised in most nationalistic ideologies of European and Asian countries, thus the wider use of the expression seems legitimate.

44
See a more detailed elaboration of these myths in Hubbes, "Ancient voices."

45
The new religious movements building upon this new type of national mythology were discussed in English in several previous studies: beside the already referred Hubbes, "Ancient Voices," see also László-Attila Hubbes and Povedák, István, "Competitive pasts: Ethno-paganism as a Placebo-effect for identity reconstruction processes in Hungary and Romania," *Religiski-filozofiski raksti* 17, no. 17 (2014): 133–52; István Povedák, "Invisible borders: Christian–neopagan syncretism in Hungary," in *Religion, Religiosity and Contemporary Culture: From Mystical to Irrational and Vice Versa*, ed. Aleksandra Pavicevic (Beograd: Ethnographic Inst. 30. SASA, 2014), 143–56. Also see László Kürti, "Psychic phenomena, Neoshamanism, and the cultic milieu in Hungary," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 4, no. 2 (2001): 322–50.

46
Povedák István, "Az UFO-kultúra társadalomtudományi vizsgálata" (A social scientific investigation of UFO culture), in *Tapasztalatból hallottam . . . Alternatív világképek, összeesküvés elméletek társadalomtudományi elemzése*, ed. István Povedák and László Hubbes, (Szeged: MAKAT—MoMiMű, 2017), 138–94.

47
Zoltán Paál, *Arvisura (Igazszólás) Regék a hun és a magyar törzsszövetség rovásírásos krónikájából,* 3rd ed. (Arvisura

"Truthtelling." Sagas from the runic chronicle of the Hun and Magyar tribal confederation) (Budapest: Püski Kiadó, 2003 [first published 1972]). English excerpts: accessed 3rd April 2023, http://www.book-of-true.com/arvisura/what-is-arvisura.html. The *Arvisura* has become the foundation of several new religious movements; see Hubbes and Povedák, "Competitive pasts."

48 *Ataisz* (Atais)—according to Paál the land of *Ata-Izisz* father-god—was an Atlantis-like prehistoric continent lost in the Pacific Ocean, the ancient homeland of the "Palóc" Magyars, accessed 3rd April 2023, http://www.arvisura.van.hu/keret.cgi?/0603-ataisz.htm.

49 Miklós Szedlacsik's *PPH Nyílt Akadémia* (PPH Open Academy); see footnote no. 2 above (accessed 3rd April 2023, http://pph.hu/hu/szeretet-coaching-nyilt-akademia-hunortradez-rt-szedlacsikmiklos-tanoda2000kft-boldogsag); *Huniversitas—Creation Studies*, accessed 3rd April 2023, http://creation-studies.one/.

50 Miklós Szedlacsik's YouTube channel: accessed 3rd April 2023, https://www.youtube.com/@szedlacsikmiklospph; György Kisfaludy's YouTube channel: *Teremtéstan* (Creation Studies), accessed 3rd April 2023, https://www.youtube.com/@teremtestan/featured.

51 György Kisfaludy's *Terembura—Magazine of Creation,* website of the Church of the Universe, and the Hun Minority in Hungary, accessed 3rd April 2023, http://hunok.hu/startlapok/ujstartlap.html; Kozsdi Tamás, *Hun Történelem* (Hunnic History), accessed 3rd April 2023, http://www.geocities.ws/huntortenelem/01.html; Sikila *hun-lapja* (Sikila's "Hun Page"), accessed 3rd April 2023, http://arvisura.van.hu/keret.cgi?/06-arvisura.htm.

52 Katalin Fehérné Lendvay, *MAGOK vagyunk* (We are SEEDS) accessed 3rd April 2023, http://magokvagyunk.blogspot.com/; Kati Gábor, *A Magyarok Tudása* (Knowledge of Magyars) accessed 3rd April 2023, http://emf-kryon.blogspot.com/.

53 Facebook groups like *Arvisura a valódi Magyar Történelem* (Arvisura the real Hungarian history): accessed 3rd April 2023, https://www.facebook.com/groups/Arvisura/; *A Pilis Szakrális Történelme* (The sacred history of Pilis) accessed 3rd April 2023, https://www.facebook.com/pilisszakralis.

54 Anthony Smith, *Nationalism* (Canberra: Australian University Press, 1979). On the sacralisation of state and nation see Joep Leersen, "Sacral states: The Politics of worship, religious and secular," in *Great Immortality: Studies on European Cultural Sainthood*, ed. Jón Karl Helgason and Marijan Dović (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 15–27.

55 See Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*

from the Arvisura, while some are more restrained, mirroring only certain aspects of this highly colourful mosaic.

Other myths, like those presented in the multimedia tabloid *Hihetetlen! Magazin* cited earlier, produce uncountable disparate narratives linking together all the elements mentioned within the framework of a unifying mentality, further reverberating in dedicated open academies,[49] video channels,[50] websites,[51] blogs,[52] and social media networks and forums.[53]

Context: occult legacies and the cultic milieu

Considering that these variations in the new national mythologies do not emerge as independent, unrelated phenomena, it is important to understand the wider cultural-spiritual context. Why and how can alternative history meet mysticism, the occult sciences (pseudosciences), and esotericism? It is also essential to see how these unconventional belief systems reach the confluence of more contemporary mentalities, movements, or trending ideas of New Age spirituality and UFO lore.

Nationalism, as a secular supplicant (and auxiliary) for the earlier religious world views urged many of its adherents towards the sacralisation of the nation itself, already in the nineteenth century.[54] In this process, the search for the mythic origins—other than those revealed by the scientific explanations of history, linguistics, ethnology, or anthropology—became of utmost importance in the restitution of transcendence (and thus the dignity and glory) to a nation, usually subject to severe crises throughout the turmoils of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Legendary and mythic elements of ancient chronicles, inexact and arguable references to historiographic works from antiquity came to the fore as (the only) writings really relevant for those interested in the mystic primacy and superiority of their nation.

Esoteric mysticism, theosophy, neo-gnosticism, and occult cosmic astrology as counter-currents[55] of scientific positivism over the last two centuries came to aid in the construction of the mythic nation, bringing in ideas of great astrological world cycles, cultural predestination, or racial superiority.[56] The "discovery" of mysterious lost continents[57] and civilisations gave a new impetus to the imaginary prehistory. At the same time, the recklessly imaginative theorising (and many lacunae) of early archaeology, geology, and (palaeo)anthropology—drawing on trending ideas of evolutionism, social Darwinism, diffusionism, and race biology—modernised mythic thinking, channeling it towards scientifically more adapted ways of research and argumentation. Scientifically elaborated discourse made even the most fantastic mythic allegations more acceptable for the sensitive contemporary public as well. By the first half of the twentieth century Atlantis, Mu, and Lemuria, together with (Ultima) Thule, Hyperborea, Agartha, or Shambala were just as possible historical realities to be reckoned with,[58] as the hypothetical prehistoric empires and high cultures of the Aryans, Pelasgians, and historical Sumerians, the Etruscans, and the Celtic, Hunnic, Illyrian, or Scythian peoples—at least in the Western popular mindset, but certainly in mystical nationalist circles.

Through the thirties and forties, the political sphere readily integrated these mystical ideas into its ideologies. In countries where Fascist or National-Socialist ideologies[59] rose to political power or developed into authoritarian regimes, mythic prehistory and anthropology was consecrated as quasi-official science. The occult myths of prehistory also fuelled other

nationalistic ideologies of pan-Germanism, Aryanism, Nordicism, Celticism, and even pan-Slavism, together with an enthusiastic return towards Heathenism. Similar racial, or equivalent ethnocentric, views converged with occult esoteric ideas in Central, Eastern European, and Balkan countries to develop into state-supported Protochronism,[60] as expressions of the "resentment nationalism" of minor nations.

In later decades, New Age spirituality in the West and wide interest in para-sciences in the Soviet Union[61] and its Eastern European area of influence led to an even wider acceptance of beliefs in paranormal phenomena, alternative prehistoric speculations (pseudo-history), and palaeo-astronautics.[62] More recently, UFO lore and beliefs in extraterrestrial contact have spread in popular culture, a process that made its impact on the formation of the new national mythologies as well.[63] While in the first phase ethnogenesis histories started being linked with lost continents, legendary prehistoric high civilisations, or mysteriously vanished previous humanities, later, in the second half of the last century[64] (and more prominently in the past decades), these myths gradually grew connected to accounts of ancient visitors from the stars as founders and teachers of the distant ancestors.[65]

However, these ancient mysteries replete with prehistoric aliens are only one aspect of several new national mythologies. Another equally essential aspect is the appearance of extraterrestrial agents or messengers in the myths concerning some utopian, messianic, or eschatologic future.[66] In order to reach this side of the national neomythology, we have to approach similarly widespread contemporary phenomena of a rather more religious nature.

New Age spirituality and Cosmism, together with esoterism, already represent the re-emergence of religiosity in the context of the modern secularised world. Together they contribute to what is called in contemporary social theory "the cultic milieu"[67]—or as others term it, "Occulture,"[68] "Conspirituality"[69]—a quasi-religious environment in which religious beliefs, scientific information, para-scientific interests, occult esoterism, and conspiracy mentality form a plastic, ever-changing, and ever-adapting bricolage world view. A basic feature is that its adepts sense their own world view as "forbidden"[70] or "stigmatised knowledge"[71] and adopt a paranoid apologetic attitude towards/against all other discourses of modernity, which is important, because new national mythologies interact with (are actually part of) this cultic milieu on multiple levels, most often along religious lines.

Nationalism in its form of civil religion[72] also plays an important part in this process, and as countless studies have shown,[73] national or ethnic identity is strengthened with new forms of religiosity—including neopaganism, especially ethno-paganism.[74] Further on, through the rediscovery and revitalisation of pre-Christian heathen traditions as well as the repaganisation of the central elements of Christianity, Christian-Neopagan syncretism[75] forms an organic background for new national mythologies.[76] On the one hand, key Christian figures—Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and other biblical personalities, like Enoch or Nimrod—go through a process of ethnic re-mythologisation.[77]

On the other hand, under the influence of "UFOlkloristic" and paleoastronautic ideas *en vogue* in popular culture since the sixties, many of the central deities and figures of ancient and new religions are identified or linked with ancient aliens from the outer space.[78] In new national

(Leiden: Brill, 1996); Wouter Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); also Olav Hammer, "The theosophical current in the twentieth century," in *The Occult World*, ed. Christopher Partridge (New York: Routledge, 2015), 348–60.

56
For a short overview of the main theories in these para-anthropological fields; see David Allen Harvey, "The lost Caucasian civilization: Jean-Sylvain Bailly and the roots of the Aryan myth," *Modern Intellectual History* 11, no. 2 (2014): 279–306, https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924431400002X, also Alexander Zaitchik, "Close encounters of the racist kind," *Hatewatch*, 2nd January 2018, (with references to Andrew Jackson, I. L. Donnelly, etc.), https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/01/02/close-encounters-racist-kind, as well as Ramon Glazov, "Ancient astronaut Aryans: On the far right obsession with Indo-Europeans: The bizarre pseudo-historical belief system behind White nationalism," *Literary Hub*, 28th April 2017, https://lithub.com/ancient-astronaut-aryans-on-the-far-right-obsession-with-indo-europeans/.

57
It suffices to refer here to the hypothetical continents of Mu and Lemuria made famous by Helena Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1877); and later, by James Churchward's *The Lost Continent of Mu* (New York: W. E. Rudge, 1926).

58
See Umberto Eco, *Storia delle terre e dei luoghi leggendari* (Milano: Bompiani, 2013).

59
See Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (London: Tauris Parke Paperback, 2004); also Peter Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Fascism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race and Nation in Germany and Italy, 1900–1945* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), as well as Joscelyn Godwin, *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism and Nazi Survival* (Kempton: Adventures Unlimited Press, 1996). The occult played a role in the USSR as well: Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *The Occult in Modern Russian and Soviet Culture* (Washington D.C.: Fordham University, 1993).

60
This was the case of Romanian nationalist communism in the seventies and eighties of the last century. However, as a contemporary researcher proposes, "protochronic dementia" is "the disease of small nations"; Dan Alexe, *Dacopatia şi alte rătăciri româneşti* (Dacopathia and other Romanian misbeliefs) (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2015), 123. On Protochronism see Alexandra Tomiţă, *O istorie "glorioasă": Dosarul protocronismului românesc* (A "glorious" history: The Romanian protochronism files) (Bucureşti: Ed. Cartea Românească, 2007).

61
Which, in turn, is inseparable from *Cosmism*, the specific Russian counterpart of Western spiritualism; discussed in detail by Majsova, "The Cosmic subject . . ." and Terbish, "Russian Cosmism . . ." For the parapsychology aspect see Serge Kernbach, "Unconventional

research in USSR and Russia: Short overview," *International Journal of Unconventional Science (IJUS)* 3, no. 1 (2013): 50–71, https://doi.org/10.17613/brte-pr79; for the pseudo-history aspect see Konstantin Sheiko, "Lomonosov's Bastards: Anatolii Fomenko, Pseudo-History and Russia's Search for a Post-Communist Identity" (PhD diss., University of Wollongong, 2004).

62

I have to agree with one of the reviewers of this article, who wrote: "An interesting point rising here (which might well be unresearched and doesn't have to be pursued here) is whether the new national mythologies in Hungary [. . .] were influenced by the wide interest in para-sciences of the Soviet era—all the more so, as the Eastern bloc seems to have followed the West in the post war shift of interest from lost continents to aliens, which in the case of the socialist countries acquired official dimensions." Still, we can definitely recognise some para-scientific elements surviving in national neomythologies even later, as in the case of the "*pallag* culture" theory (see below), where dowsing methods of "earth vibration" measurements for establishing the "energy levels" of *pallag* terraces (actually, considered vestiges of "ancient earth pyramyds" as alien structures) are used as arguments for demonstrating the astral origins of Szekler Hungarians.

63

An excellent overview is offered by Jason Colavito, *Cult of Alien Gods: H. P. Lovecraft and Extraterrestrial Pop Culture* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2005).

64

In some cases, such as in Germany, the idea of alien contact or origin emerged even earlier, at the beginning of the last century: starting from the alleged Vril Society, where the Aryan race was connected to the star system *Aldebaran*. See Julian Strube, *Vril: eine okkulte Urkraft in Theosophie und esoterischem Neonazismus* (München: Wilhem Fink, 2013).

65

While the works of: Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, *Le Matin des magiciens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), Erich von Däniken, *Erinnerungen an die Zukunft*, (Düsseldorf: Econ Verlag, 1968), Zecharia Sitchin, *The 12th Planet* (New York: Stein and Day, 1976), David Icke, *The Robot's Rebellion* (London: Gateway, 1994) generally deal with the involvement of extraterrestrials in ancient human past (and present), Robert Charroux's book *Le livre des mondes oubliés* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 1971) in English: *Lost Worlds: Scientific Secrets of the Ancients* (London: Fontana, 1974) already takes an explicit ethnocentric turn, sustaining that the Atlantean and Hyperborean ancestors of the Celts were originally aliens.

66

Carole Cusack, "Apocalypse in early UFO and alien-based religions: Christian and theosophical themes," in *Modernism, Christianity, and Apocalypse: Studies in Religion and the Arts*, ed. Erik Tonning, Matthew Feldman and David Addyman (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 340–54, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004282285_020; Benjamin Zeller, "Apocalyptic thought in UFO-based religions," in *End of Days: Essays on the Apocalypse from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Karolyn Kinane and Michael A. Ryan (Jefferson: McFarland, 2014), 328–48.

mythologies, the ancestral gods, heroes, and the already "ethnicised" Christian figures sometimes grow connected with extraterrestrial beings and civilisations.[79]

These syncretic, ethnicised, and "*alien*-ised" elements of new national mythologies merge with already extant apocalyptic ideas of electedness, messianism, millennium, and eschatology—deriving mostly from the Judaeo-Christian traditions. However, the blending of nationalistic and apocalyptic or millennial ideas is not a new phenomenon, because it has been present since the first phase of modern national mythologies.[80] The novelty consists in the fact that the mystical and mythic origins of a nation linked to a lost continent, a prehistoric civilisation, a race of demigods, or a sacred bloodline of heavenly kings and heroes was (and still is) often bound on the one hand with a messianic sense of mission to fulfil and rule a Millennial Kingdom on Earth, and on the other hand, with an apocalyptic anxiety of being threatened existentially by united occult, worldly forces—both rooted in convictions of exclusivism, primacy, and supremacy.

The overt or latent apocalypticism represents a specific dimension of the cultic milieu: the contemporary "apocalyptic milieu"—a rich environment of anxiety and of "readiness [. . .] to hope for profound, indeed cataclysmic, change,"[81] but also of firm convictions that such cataclysmic changes took place in the prehistoric distant past, annihilating previous worlds, humanities, or civilisations and leading to the birth of the ancestral culture as an elect nation. This milieu converges with an eclectic system of beliefs that Michael Barkun calls "improvisational millennialism," a bricolage of (seemingly) "undisciplined borrowings from unrelated sources,"[82] nevertheless with the tendency towards becoming a new kind of religious millennialism in which biblical traditions are reinterpreted and/or replaced by elements of legendary-historical motives constructed into a new national mythology. It might be called ethnic or national millennialism, resembling the system of creeds that fuelled the mystical millennialism of the ideologies of National Socialism and Fascism of the past century, or of today's White Supremacy and the Aryan Nation movements, in which the nation or the race has a sacred messianic mission to overcome (even annihilate) the occult cabal of inferior peoples,[83] and establish an everlasting utopia of purity, order, and prosperity on Earth.

Still, in many contemporary new mythologies—including in the Hungarian ones under examination here—these ideas present themselves in a rather optimistic "progressive millennialism,"[84] with a focus on healing the world and saving humanity from its present decay—in accordance with the present New Age spirituality.[85] The emphasis in these narratives has shifted from belligerence towards healing and renovation. A complementary "avertive apocalypticism"[86] is also present in several variants: accompanied by anxieties of global corruption and even more by paranoid fears concerning one's own nation's end, we can find promising prophecies and guidance with regards to avoiding the impending doom. The apocalyptic nature of these characteristics represents eschatologic, millennial, messianic fears and hopes of contemporary crisis mentalities. They also reflect identity crises on the level of nation and religion as well as a crisis of a moral nature, where the values and ethos of the ethnos seem to offer the only assurance and stability against the threat of the amoral dissolution of traditional values brought by the globalised world. Apocalyptic, millennial aspects magnify this tension and lend it a transcendent, universal perspective.

As a last development over the past decades, apocalyptic and millennial ideas fused with alien myths[87] and brought about fundamental transformations in the new national mythologies. New myths of national ethnogenesis and national eschatology acquired extraterrestrial aspects:[88] the prehistoric ancestors, deities, and teachers of the people, the founders of the mysterious high civilisations that had perished with the lost continents before human memory, just as the heavenly guardians, patrons, and saviours of the nation in the final tribulations and fulfilment to come, often appear as visitors from the stars or secret earthly co-residents of extraterrestrial origin. The benevolent and malevolent aliens of popular culture,[89] tabloids, and social media have invaded ethnic prehistory, the collective destiny, and the national future. Just like the apocalyptic aspects, the extraterrestrial aspects too have the potential to lend the new national mythologies cosmic significance and universal perspective.

Finally, the Internet and digital media, more generally, offer a prolific field for the formation and propagation of these new national mythologies, a process in which the enthusiastic public is not only a passive consumer and follower but to a similar extent an active creator and sharer of these narratives,[90] which proliferate in an unprecedented variety, impossible to encompass in their entirety.

Cosmic neomythologies

The Hungarian new national mythic universe is a complex, eclectic construction, abundant in fantastic elements. Since I presented in detail the main narratives of this mythology earlier elsewhere,[91] it will suffice now to summarise them in a nutshell, only highlighting the specific extraterrestrial and apocalyptic topics and motives to be discussed in this investigation.

The diffuse new Hungarian mythology may be outlined as follows. According to the more mainstream narratives, the Magyars as ancient Turanic people[92] are descendants of the Sumerians, through the legacy line of Parthians, Scythians, Attila's Huns, and the Avars (and more generally, the ancient Turkic peoples of the Eurasian steppe), while they are also the undisrupted successors of the primeval neolithic population of the Carpathian basin, the last bearers of the language, culture, and spirituality of the first people of creation, being at the same time the progenitors of all nations of the world.

Compared to these main narratives, in Zoltán Paál's[93] *Arvisura* the celestial ancestors (of greater knowledge and higher civilisation) of the Hun-Magyar peoples came from Sirius—the realm of *Lady Kaltes*, a companion planet of the Earth—as a group of Heavenly Ones led by *Anyahita* goddess.[94] Suffering an accident with their flying space chariot on the ancient homeland of humanity: *Ataisz*, a continent in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, they mixed with the earthlings and taught them agriculture, giving them laws, wisdom, religion, and civilisation.[95] Here, on *Ataisz*, a nation rose: the people of the *Mag* (Seed), the *MAGyar*s,[96] who later colonised every continent over the course of the millennia before the glaciation, settling in the Carpathian-basin (the *Realm of Hot Waters*) as well.[97] After the cataclysmic sinking of *Ataisz* six thousand years ago (5038 BCE), the remnant of the population took refuge in the long-established *Ataisz*ian colonies and built the well-known high civilisations of the ancient world (China, Sumer, Egypt, India, Mexico, Peru, etc.).[98]

This line of the Arvisura mythology resonates with the *Tamana*-theory of Bátor Vámos-Tóth,[99] who states that the Carpathian-basin was the core of

67
Colin Campbell, "The cult, the cultic milieu and secularization," in *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 5 (1972): 119–36; Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, eds., *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 2002).

68
Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West. Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture*, 2 vols. (London: T&T Clark International, 2004–2005).

69
Charlotte Ward and David Voas, "The emergence of conspirituality," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 26 (2011): 103–21; Egil Asprem and Asbjørn Dyrendal, "Conspirituality reconsidered: How surprising and how new is the confluence of spirituality and conspiracy theory?", *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 30, no. 3 (2015): 367–82, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13537903.2015.1081339; Niels de Jong, *Creating Conspirituality. Knowledge and Empowerment on the David Icke Discussion Forum* (master's thesis, University of Gröningen, 2013).

70
Kaplan and Lööw, *The Cultic Milieu*, 3–5.

71
First coined by Michael Barkun in *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), he later developed it in more detail in Michael Barkun, "Conspiracy theories as stigmatized knowledge," *Diogenes* 62, no. 3–4 (2015): 114–20, https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192116669288.

72
Robert N. Bellah, "Civil religion in America," *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 96, no. 1 (1967): 1–21.

73
Among the most significant collections of studies, the following must be mentioned: Kaarina Aitamurto and Scott Simpson, eds., *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* (Durham: Acumen, 2013); Kathryn Rountree, ed., *Contemporary Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Europe: Colonialist and Nationalist Impulses* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015); Povedák István, Eugenia Roussou and Clara Saraiva, eds., *Expressions of Religion. Ethnography, Performance and the Senses* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2019).

74
Rozália Klára Bakó and László-Attila Hubbes, "Religious minorities web rhetoric: Romanian and Hungarian Ethno-Pagan Organizations," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 10, no. 30 (2011): 127–58; László-Attila Hubbes, "New Hungarian mythology animated. self-portraits of the nation," *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica* 5, no. 2 (2013): 223–40; László-Attila Hubbes, "Ritual deliberations around mythic narratives in online ethno-pagan communities: A rhetoric analysis of Hungarian discussion forums and ad hoc dialogues formed around specific ethnos-related neopagan topics (myths)," in *Argumentor: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Argumentation and Rhetoric*, ed. Rozália Klára

Bakó et al. (Oradea: Partium Press, 2012), 259–94; Hubbes, "Ancient voices"; Hubbes and Povedák, "Competitive Pasts."

75
Joyce Higginbotham and River Higginbotham, *ChristoPaganism: An Inclusive Path* (Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 2009), Google Books.

76
Daniela Sorea, "Two particular expressions of neo-paganism," *Bulletin of Transilvania University of Brasov, Series VII Social Sciences and Law* 6, no. 55 (2013): 1, 29–40, accessed 3rd April 2023, https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=213273; István Povedák, "Invisible borders: Christian–Neopagan syncretism in Hungary," in *Religion, Religiosity and Contemporary Culture. From Msytical to Irrational and Vice Versa*, ed. Aleksandra Pavicevic (Beograd: Ethnographic Inst. 30. SASA, 2014), 143–56, accessed 3rd April 2023, https://www.academia.edu/8675852/Invisible_Borders_Christian_-Neopagan_Syncretism_in_Hungary.

77
István Povedák and László-Attila Hubbes, "New national mythologies: Re-paganization of Christian symbolism in Hungarian and Romanian ethno-pagan culture," in *Expressions of Religion: Ethnography, Performance and the Senses*, ed. Povedák István, Eugenia Roussou and Clara Saraiva (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2019), 245–90.

78
Daniel Wojcik, "UFO mythologies: Extraterrestrial cosmology and intergalactic eschatology," *Traditiones* 50, no. 3 (2021): 15–51, https://doi.org/10.3986/Traditio2021500302. See also James Herrick, *Scientific Mythologies: How Science and Science Fiction Forge New Religious Beliefs*, ([Westmoont]: IVP Academic, 2008); Colevito, *Cult.*

79
Povedák István "The future that changed the past. A narrative-level analysis of UFO culture with special regard to paleoastronautics behind the Iron Curtain," in *Present and Past in the Study of Religion and Magic - Vallásantropológiai tanulmányok Közép-Kelet-Európából 7*, ed. Pócs Éva and Hesz Ágnes (Budapest: Balassi, 2019), 363–89. In Hungarian: Povedák István "A magyar Jézustól a repülő csészealjakig" (From the Hungarian Jesus to the flying saucers), in *Aranyhíd: Tanulmányok Keszeg Vilmos tiszteletére*, ed. Jakab Albert Zsolt and Vajda András, (Kolozsvár: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság, BBTE Magyar Néprajz és Antropológia Intézet, Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2017), 889–906.

80
See Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), revised and expanded edition 1970, accessed 3rd April 2023, https://archive.org/details/pursuitofmillenn00cohnrich; Klaus Vondung, *The Apocalypse in Germany*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002); also Smith, *Nationalism.*

81
Andrew Fergus Wilson, "From Mushrooms to

a pre-diluvial civilisation of humankind and that the proto-Hungarians were the bearers of this culture, spreading it all over the world.[100] According to the *Tamana* theory, this case is proven by the almost six thousand toponyms found in 149 countries around the world, identical or consonant with the Magyar place names in the Carpathian Basin—more than half of these place names are outside the Eurasian continent: in Africa and the Americas, as well as Oceania.[101] Vámos-Tóth's *Tamana* theory does not imply cosmic alien ancestors; however, his maps and ideas of Hungarian place names around the Earth are used to illustrate (and thus reinforce) the plausibility of István Medgyesi's book about the Hungarians coming to this world from the mysterious planet *Chineai*, as God's chosen people, with three other peoples: the Japanese, Chinese, and Ainu. Together with the Japanese, they kept wandering for six thousand years, before embarking on their separate journeys through Korea, lake Baikal, Yenisei river, Kamchatka, Bering-strait to Alaska, down through the Americas until Paraguay, then back to Asia, and through Crimeea into Pannonia to fulfil a genetic project ordered by God, the head-shaman himself.[102]

Returning to Zoltán Paál's narratives: long after the sinking of *Ataisz*, in 4040 BCE in the Far-Eastern land of Ordos (China), the alliance of 24 Hun tribes (the ancestors of the Magyars) was formed,[103] and the more than one thousand pages of the *Arvisura* tell the worldly and spiritual deeds of these various nation-tribes. As the *Arvisura* grew into a sacred book for several Ethnopagan groups and movements, different devoted commentators and exegetes updated its cosmic references to newer narratives about ancient aliens from the stars (e.g., from the Orion constellation).[104] Tamás Kozsdi, a prolific and popular writer, links the more traditional alternative historical neomythology of the Sumerian origins (of Hungarians) with the Huns described in the *Arvisura* arriving from the stars:

> "We have to befriend the idea that we do not populate the universe alone. There are almost 800 million [. . .] inhabited planets. Among these, Earth occupies quite an honourable place, but far from the best, and certainly not the only one! Here on Earth, school textbooks begin with the Sumerians, who we know mastered such an advanced writing and culture that even today we haven't been able to decipher their thousands of (clay) tablets with cuneiform writing left to us [. . .] There's no way the Sumerians originated from monkeys, because a monkey cannot write in cuneiform signs, especially not in (Hungarian) runic writing. Everybody can see through and understand here the connection of the Sumerians with the Hungarians and the highly advanced alien civilisations. Our research has led us to (the conclusion that) there are Huns living far away from Earth on another planet, in the Sirius star system. We try to show as much as possible about these Huns, our Hun brothers."[105]

The *Arvisura* universe reverberates in several newer narratives connecting extraterrestrial ancestors of ancient teacher-visitors to the primeval history of Hungarians. The first to be mentioned is an influential amateur full-length animation film on YouTube by Tibor Molnár: *Az Ég fiai* (Sons of Heaven),[106] which is partially based on the *Arvisura* (and partly on Imre Máté's *Yotengrit*).[107] Although the video does not refer explicitly to extraterrestrials, the mythic narrative itself is built upon the implicit premise (the *Ataisz*ian origin) of

Fig. 2. "Sons of Heaven," capture from video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DxV8bu5fro).

Magyars being the descendants of celestial forefathers of cosmic wisdom; this idea is visually emphasised in the first four minutes of the video (Fig. 2).

Even more important, the *Arvisura* serves as the base of a strong new religious movement:[108] the *Church of the Universe* or the *Holy Mother Church of the Huns*,[109] even complete with a "university" called *Huniversitas*,[110] led by György Kisfaludy, a "time-physicist" researcher and high priest,[111] where mythological narratives of *Ataiszian* prehistory and gnostic theology (of Energy-Holy Spirit) are corroborated with quantum physics, astrobiology, palaeo-astronautics, and ufology. As the message from the opening pages of the church state:

> "We Huns came from the infinity and we are going to the infinity. Our ancestors entrusted us with secrets that would make the deepest oceans mere puddles and the highest mountain a molehill. Look to the sky and you can always see the distance of the future, where the infinite is. There we are, there are your brothers and sisters who have not forgotten you, and everywhere you look you see only God [. . .] 6,042 years ago,[112] when our ancestors came to Earth in a great wave, we already worshipped the same God that a large part of Hungarians (and the world) still worships today [. . .] We have been Christians in the modern sense, much longer ago than you were told or taught. We didn't learn our faith on earth, we brought it with us as other peoples did. [. . . we pave] the way for a truly transformative revolution in science that can bring a more liveable world for all. Our knowledge starts from ancient foundations, but strives towards the infinite number of stars, where we came from, and to which our hearts long to return. Let us work together for a true European Hun people!"[113]

Kisfaludy's Church of the Universe is one of the best examples of the new national myths turning into an institutionalised cosmic religion, in which Neo-Pagan revivalism is mixed with popular ufology, fringe science, and New Age beliefs, with the myths of *Ataiszian* ancestors coming from the Sirius and galactic Hun brotherhood presented in a semi-scientific style.[114] A similar native faith movement is the "Ancient Hungarian Táltos Church"

the Stars: 2012 and the Apocalyptic Milieu," in *Prophecy in the New Millennium: When Prophecies Persist*, ed. Sarah Harvey and Suzanne Newcombe (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 225–38, 236, accessed 10th October 2021, https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315602585-20/mushrooms-stars-2012-apocalyptic-milieu-andrew-fergus-wilson.

82
Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy*, xi.

83
Andrew Fergus Wilson, "From apocalyptic paranoia to the mythic nation, political extremity and myths of origin in the neo-fascist milieu," in *Mysticism, Myth and Celtic Identity*, ed. Marion Gibson, Shelley Trower and Garry Tregidga (London: Routledge, 2013), 199–215.

84
Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World as We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

85
Steven J. Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

86
Daniel Wojcik, "Avertive Apocalypticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 66–88, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195301052.003.0004.

87
Wojcik, "UFO mythologies." The phenomenon is also discussed in Jason Colavito, "The origins of the space gods. ancient astronauts and the Cthulhu mythos in fiction and fact," 2011, accessed 3rd April 2023, http://www.JasonColavito.com, See his earlier book as well: Colavito, *Cult*.

88
Povedák, "The future."

89
Christopher Partridge, "Alien demonology: The Christian roots of the malevolent extraterrestrial in UFO religions and abduction spiritualities," *Religion* 34 (2004): 163–89.

90
Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2013). See also László-Attila Hubbes, "Theoretical themes in social media," in *Critical Dictionary of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements*, ed. James Crossley and Alastair Lockhart (Bedford: CENSAMM, 2022), accessed 3rd April 2023, www.cdamm.org/articles/theoretical-themes-in-social-media.

91
To mention just a few: Bakó and Hubbes, "Religious minorities"; Hubbes, "Ancient voices"; Hubbes, "New Hungarian mythology"; Hubbes and Povedák, "Competitive pasts"; Povedák and Hubbes, "Re-paganization."

92

This idea, known generically as Turanism, is latently more popular among Hungarians than the Finno-Ugric linguistic relationship officially taught, which was accepted by most academics after the end of the nineteenth century "Ugric-Turkic War": the fiery linguistic-historical debates over the origins and affiliation of Hungarian language and people. Turanism even reached close to the status of being accepted as state ideology and quasi-religion in the interwar period; see Povedák and Hubbes, "Competitive pasts." The thesis continues even today as Neo-Turanism, with a strong grip among modern Turkic nations as well; see Emel Akçalı and Umut Korkut, "Geographical metanarratives in East-Central Europe: Neo-Turanism in Hungary," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 53, no. 5 (2012): 596–614, https://doi.org/10.2747/1539-7216.53.5.596.

93

Zoltán Paál (1913–1982) was a steelworker who stated that he had become shaman during World War II, after being initiated by a Siberian Mansi (Vogul) shaman (then partisan soldier in the Soviet Red Army) named Szalaváré Tura. As an autodidact, Paál kept writing his enormous oeuvre—exceeding a thousand pages—until his death, adapting all he read, from legends of Finno-Ugric peoples and alternative history books to the emerging theories of paleoastronautics, into a monumental mythology, which he titled "Arvisura" or "Truth-telling" encompassing *432 thousand years* of imaginary history of the Hungarians. This fantastic mythopoetic work has grown into a founding myth for several Hungarian neo-shaman, ethno-pagan groups, with thousands of adepts. See Hubbes, "Ritual deliberations."

94

Paál, *Arvisura*, 35–46. The goddess *Anyahita*—as many other deity names in the Arvisura—is a borrowing from Middle Eastern mythology, resembling *Anahit*, the ancient Armenian goddess of fertility and healing, wisdom and water (the Hungarian meaning is composed approximately from *Anya*: "mother" + *hit*: "belief").

95

Vég Csaba, "Az Arvisurák szellemisége" (The spirituality of the Arvisuras), online article (personal website of the author: vegcsaba.weaveworld.org, 2012) accessed 7th November 2023, https://docplayer.hu/233742-Veg-csaba-az-arvisurak-szellemisege.html.

96

The idea that the Magyars are the "seed" people or "core" people, (HU: "mag" = EN: "seed," "stone," "core," "nucleus") is one of the central, mostly common teachings of new national myths of Hungarians. More on this topic in László-Attila Hubbes, "Rhetoric of healing in contemporary Hungarian ethno-religious myths in Szeklerland, Transylvania," in *ARGUMENTOR 4—MENS SANA: The Fourth Argumentor Conference: Rethinking the Role of Emotions*, ed. Bakó and Rozália Klára (Oradea: Partium Press; Debrecen: University Press, 2016), 131–42. Also, Judit Kis-Halas, "Sacred sites reinterpreted: New Age phenomena at a Hungarian Marian Shrine," in *Traces of the Virgin Mary in Post-Communist Europe*, ed. Tatiana Zachar Podolinská, (Bratislava: Veda, 2019), 56–75. A good presentation of the concept may be found

branching off from the previous church and led by András Kovács(-Magyar), a táltos healer using shamanic techniques and planetary vibrations, according to whom Jesus (of Scythian-Hungarian origin) came from a constellation called "Aquileia."[115]

András Magyar and his Táltos Church are the main propagators of "the Hungarians' most sacred site" around which another entire mythology with cosmic references unfolds: the Pilis hills in Hungary, considered by believers the "Heart Chakra of the Earth."[116] We can understand the connections between all the mythic elements referred to through an argumentation drawn on a Hungarian esoteric website: "Jesus is naturally connected with Sirius, as the Heart Chakra of the Galaxy (Sirius) is connected to the Sun. The Sun (is connected) with the Pilis, and the Pilis with us (Hungarians)."[117] In the narratives and rituals surrounding the Pilis hills, the central idea is that—beyond being a region full of ruins of ancient Hungarian fortifications and also a centre of the Hungarian-founded order of Pauline Fathers[118]—the three peaks of the range are forgotten giant pyramids arranged in the order and orientation of the three stars of the Orion belt,[119] and the place is also full of spiritual energy lines and miraculous healing powers.[120] In addition to these neomythological aspects, the place has become richer with aliens lately: Attila Miklós, an adept of the *Arvisura* universe and enthusiastic UFO-researcher, offers an essential compendium to the formation of this emerging eclectic new cosmic mythology in his book about the mystical history of Hun-Magyars.[121] He repeatedly refers to ufologist László Tóth, according to whom seven sarcophagi with reptilian mummies were found in a cave in the Pilis, and takes this as evidence for the lizard-headed beings met by the Hungarian kings during their visits to the Paulian monks.

Ancient pyramidal structures attributed to aliens were discovered in Transylvania as well: Tivadar Czimbalmas, an ethnic Szekler-Hungarian from Romania, spent years investigating of earth terrace formations called "pallag" in Szeklerland region, which he considers vestiges of a prehistoric culture originating from the stars.[122] In his view, this mysterious "Pallag culture" represents the descendants of aliens (Sons of the Sun) who arrived on starships through "energy portals," settling in the Carpathian basin, and were the ancestors of the Szekler-Hungarians.

The presupposed pyramids of the Pilis-mountains, those in Transylvania and elsewhere in the Carpathian basin are often linked in the Hungarian neomythology to the "Bosnian pyramids" (a cluster of natural hills near the town Visoko, surrounded by a set of tunnels)[123] as part of a world-wide energy network. What makes these Bosnian pyramids and the Ravne tunnels important for the Magyar neomythology is the fact that the many signs belonging to the neolithic Vinča culture (the "Danube script") discovered in and around them have been identified by Hungarian palaeography enthusiasts as elements of the Szekler-Hungarian runic writing.[124] Moreover, theories emerged about the alien origins of both the pyramid hills as transport structures corresponding to Nikola Tesla's energy technology[125] and the runic signs.[126]

Further on, Hungarian runic writing, identified as the script of the Arvisura, plays a central role in the famous Izsáky files, worthy of an *X-Files*-like television series. In 1974, László Izsáky (an ethnic Hungarian from Romania), inspired by the golden plaques of NASA's 1972 *Pioneer 10* space probe and a subsequent UFO sighting in San Jose De Valderas in Spain in 1973—thought to be an answer to the Pioneer's message—drew a

giant Ж shaped "calling sign" (contact message) on the ground in Transylvania, in the Gutin mountains. According to the story, as expected, a UFO landed on 7th June 1974 and Izsáky together with his friends received a series of 86 gold plates from the alien beings. They had managed to copy the symbols that were on the plates before the Securitate (the Romanian Secret Police) confiscated them after a short combat and tortured Izsáky and two other friends, forcing them into psychiatric asylum.[127] The case was discussed in full detail by Zsuzsanna Perlaki, ufologist blogger and investigative journalist, severely criticising the older generation of Hungarian UFO circles for not supporting Izsáky seriously.[128] According to rumours, Izsáky disappeared in 2004, perhaps taken to Sirius.[129] Ufologist Géza Kisteleki links the golden plates of the *Arvisura*, hidden in the Ural mountains (according to Zoltán Paál), with the extraterrestrial messages of the Transylvanian golden plates presented and decoded by László Izsáky.[130] According to Kisteleki, the signs on Izsáky's golden plates correspond to the Hungarian-Szekler runic script, revealing the *Arvisuras* of the Ural golden plates, and represent the sacral geometry, the energy and symbolism preserved in the mythologies of humanity and sacral memory of the great cultures of old and the forgotten Hungarian past.[131]

Izsáky was not the only one waiting for or meeting visitors from the stars. Klára Sándor, in her book about Hungarian neomythologies,[132] describes the case of a Transylvanian Hungarian woman: Gizella Bartha, who had been visited by the Count of St. Germain, a present-day avatar of an ancient Táltos king from a planet on the Sirius system (actually "Enlil, the sixth son of Nimrod from Sirius"), and who dictated to her the "other" *Arvisuras* (different from Zoltán Paál's, nevertheless, also an authentic scripture), the entire set of galactic teachings about the karmic ways of the world from Atlantis to the present day and the mystical salvation role of the Hungarians in the approaching dimension change cataclysm (the Apocalypse).[133]

Such confluences of Hungarian myths, New Age spirituality, and UFO beliefs are not uncommon. Anthropologist Judit Kis-Halas has investigated a series of Hungarian web pages and online forums and conducted several interviews with New Age believers and healers. In the case of her two interlocutors, the angels to whom they prayed could be identified as either benevolent or malevolent extra-terrestrial creatures, involved in a galactic conspiracy.[134] We can understand the relevance of these beliefs for the cosmic religiousness of the new Hungarian mythology if we take into account the observations summarised by Kis-Halas in a set of four topics appearing in the discourses she investigated: "1. birth of a 'new world order' and related apocalyptic predictions; 2. conspiracy theories; 3. extra-terrestrials and UFOs; 4. the date and role of Hungarians in the present and future order of the Universe."[135] Further examples of such correlations between angels as aliens or higher energies and Hungarian cosmic religious syncretism can be found in several new religious or spiritual communities, such as the "Bolya-nest" and Prophet dénes's charismatic movement researched by Koppány-László Csáji,[136] or the countless online forums, blogs, and websites where adepts discuss and echo teachings about past and present angelic or divine beings from the stars, the Sirian origins and the mystic MAG ("Seed") nature of the Magyars,[137] playing the healing role in humanity's future destiny.[138]

In these latter discourses the Magyars (the "MAG people," as referred to above) are believed to bear a messianic, eschatological mission in the

on Zsuzsanna Fanni Váradi-Kalmár-Kálmánchey's websites *Amagdala*: "New atomism: The saving seed," accessed 3rd April 2023, https://www.amagdala.hu/en/new-atomism and *Magura*: "The awakening world," accessed 3rd April 2023, https://mag-ura.com/en/ (2016-2023).

97
Accessed 3rd April 2023, http://www.book-of-true.com/arvisura/what-is-arvisura.html; Paál, *Arvisura*.

98
As the Arvisura names them: *Uruk-Om*, *Agaba-Om* (China), *Hyksos-Om* (Egypt), *Anina-Om* (Mesopotamia), *Parsi-Om* (Parthia), *Indio-Om* (India), *Mayan-Om* (Mexico), and *Kusko-Om* (Peru).

99
Dr. Bátor Vámos-Tóth (1928–2006), a Hungarian émigré, settled in Hawaii and started his "Tamana" international research project on pre-supposed Hungarian name structures around the world in the seventies. His ideas were taken further even by foreign authors like Clyde Winters ("Tamana culture: The pre-diluvial civilization of mankind," *Olmec98.net*, accessed 3rd April 2023, http://olmec98.net/tamana.htm or Jim Willis, *Lost Civilizations: The Secret Histories and Suppressed Technologies of the Ancients* (n.p.: Visible Ink Press, 2019).

100
Vámos-Tóth Bátor, *Tamana. Világnévtár* (Tamana. World toponym directory) (Székesfehérvár: Magyarországért, Édes Hazánkért Kiadó, 2005) and Vámos-Tóth Bátor, "A név-szerkezetek világfüzére: minden út Tamanába vezet" (The worldwide chain of name structures: All roads lead to Tamana) online article, accessed 6th October 2010, http://sgforum.hu/listazas.php3id=1078212785&order=reverse&index=2&azonosito=magyarazonos.

101
Vámos-Tóth, *Tamana*; Winters, "Tamana." Though not directly based on József Cserép's and Jenő Csicsáky's already referred "Lemurian" theory inspired by Churchward's Mu-mythology, the *Tamana* theory reuses the same (hyper-)diffusionist ideas, this time in a linguistic guise.

102
Medgyesi István, *Isten magyarjai* (God's Hungarians) (Budapest: self-pub., 2003) referred to in Bolyki, Tamás, "Magyar vándor. Tizenötezer év alatt a föld körül" (Hungarian wanderer: Fifteen thousand years around the Earth), *Hihetetlen! Magazin. A magyarság 20.000 éves történelme* 1 (2012): 18–19; also Bolyki, Tamás, "Évezredes kalandozásaink: Magyarok Mindenütt" (Our thousands of years of wandering: Hungarians everywhere), *Hihetetlen! Magazin. A magyarság 20.000 éves történelme* 4 (2017): 17–20.

103
Paál, *Arvisura*, 22–24.

104
Kozsdi, Tamás, *A magyar ősemlékezet és az Arvisura világkép* (The archaic memory of Hungarians and the world view of the Arvisura) (Budapest: Angyali Menedék, 2005), or the websites edited by him: (Kozsdi, Tamás) "Idegen civilizációk és a földönkívüli

Hun testvéreink élete" (Alien civilisations and the life of our extraterrestrial Hun brothers), *Hun történelem*, (2002), accessed 3rd April 2023, http://www.geocities.ws/huntortenelem/01.html; and echoed further on pages like Móréné Tokai, Kiss Éva's "Misztikus vonatkozások és földönkívüliekre történő utalások az Arvisurákban" (Mystical aspects and references to extraterrestrials in the Arvisuras). *Hun történelem* webpage, accessed 3rd April 2023, http://www.geocities.ws/huntortenelem/02.html.

105
Kozsdi, "Idegen civilizációk," accessed 3rd April 2023, http://www.geocities.ws/huntortenelem/txt/fej01.txt.

106
Available on YouTube, on Tibor Molnár's channel: accessed 3rd April 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbodRT2bA_Y&t=3s. The English translation of the video can be accessed here: accessed 3rd April 2023, http://transcriptvids.com/v/HbodRT2bA_Y.html. Although the video has credits at the end, no further independent information can be found about the makers. Still, it may be said that since its first publication on 14th February 2010, the video has gained a relatively high popularity, with 30K views on the original channel and around twenty repostings elsewhere, and the film was also marketed in CD version in specialised bookstores. For a detailed analysis see Hubbes, "New Hungarian."

107
Extensively analyzed in Hubbes, "New Hungarian."

108
This is a special case when a new religious movement is at the same time a new national movement: concomitantly with the development of Kisfaludy's Hun ecclesia, a petition was prepared to recognise the Huns (who disappeared from Europe in the fifth century CE) as an ethnic minority in Hungary, which was rejected on 25th April 2005. A chronicle of the process is presented on the website of the Hun community: accessed 3rd April 2023, http://hunnemzetiseg.weebly.com/jelenuumlnk.html. There is also a report on the issue in English by Nick Thorpe: "Hungary blocks Hun minority bid," *BBC News*, 12th April 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4435181.stm.

109
Between 1997 and 2011 (when Hungarian legislation severely reduced the number of acknowledged official religious denominations) they functioned as a recognised religious congregation, and after 2011 with the status of "foundation with religious activity," with more than ten thousand declared members (estimated). Exact information about the community can be found on Wikipedia: accessed 3rd April 2023, https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Az_Univerzum_Egyh%C3%A1za. Also see: "Hungarian native faith" article on Wikipedia: accessed 3rd April 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_Native_Faith.

110
Originally available from the church's website, the active site and the courses of the "Hun University" today can be accessed at: https://www.angelfire.com/planet/dictionaries/ (26th July 2023).

salvation history of humanity. The healing role, however, is coupled with an apocalyptic tone. It is expected that—as in the past, when Attila the Hun was mandated and supported by heavenly (extraterrestrial) beings to end the decayed Roman empire to save the world[139]—they will receive celestial help from a returning mythic figure. This is a figure known from the biblical traditions: King *Nimrod*—identified with Orion, the celestial hunter, and with *Ménrót*, the legendary forefather of Hungarians in the ancient chronicles. In the fourth special issue of *Hihetetlen! Magazin* dedicated to "20.000 years of Hungarian history," there is an article that discusses this topic:

> "Many people believe that Hungarians have some special mission in history. They refer to ancient prophecies, that in the distant future, when the human world is threatened with annihilation, a Turanian horse-riding archer people, the descendants of Nimrod will prevent the apocalypse and restore the disturbed harmony between Earth, man, and the Universe."[140]

József Kántor explains the cosmic role of Nimrod in the approaching Apocalypse:

> "The prophecy was known to the Babylonians that at the end of time these seven tribes would reunite under the leadership of the 'reincarnated' King Nimród/Ménrót [Nemroth]. Supposedly, even the destroyed Tower itself will be rebuilt at that time [. . .] It is said that the 'Panther King' built this tower in order to confront a dark force from its top, that approached the Earth in those ancient times. We don't know exactly what or who it was, because the already hazy mythological references are even more vague than usual! All that can be inferred is that it was a powerful demonic being, a kind of 'Dark Lord' who was a fierce enemy of humanity! The Eastern traditions roughly agree that Nimród/Ménrót [Nemroth], as the 'Sun Panther'—that is, the chosen representative of the gods—took up the fight with the dark power from the top of the Tower. He climbed onto his 'heavenly chariot' and ascended from the top floor into the stars, where he shot an arrow from his magical bow at the demon king's 'Chariot of Fire' [. . .] From the point of view of palaeo-astronautics, the question arises here: Could this legend preserve the memory of a space war, and Nimród's Tower could have been not only an observatory, but also a kind of space port?"[141]

Conclusions

The new Hungarian national mythology integrates elements of "cosmic religion"—ancient aliens, extraterrestrial ancestors, galactic saviours, and apocalyptic motives—into their narratives, creating a bricolage of stories of "improvisational"[142] ethnogenesis and ethno-eschatology—splintered, mosaic-like, yet unitary universes. The neomythology adapts to the current global ideas of the cultic milieu, trends of conspirituality, adopting alien beings, cosmic entities from New Age spirituality, UFO culture and popular media, weaving them into their own older, classical mythic stories.

The differences between the Hungarian national cosmic

neomythologies examined here, on the one hand, and the more classical national mythic narratives, as well as the canonical historical and linguistic theses sustained by the academical science, on the other, originate from the influences of the worldwide trends in alternative history, para-sciences, ufology, palaeo-astronautics, New Age ideas, and contemporary conspiratorial thinking, but also from scientific frontiers and cosmic age enthusiasm—all adapted to the Hungarian context. The Hungarian *Kaltes Asszony* (Lady Kaltes), goddess *Anyahita*, and *Ata-Izisz* father-god of the *Arvisura* mythology are alien ancestors from *Joli-tórem*, the Sirius system from the Canis Maior constellation, who landed on the mythical *Ataisz* continent, giving rise to the forefathers of Hungarians to a global, colonising, and civilising culture. As regards the present and the future, again, this mythic universe is centred on the messianic eschatologic mission to save mankind, deriving from the protochronic primacy and moral, spiritual superiority of the nation over all the other ethnic groups, cultures, civilisations. The new Hungarian cosmic myths state that the *MAGyar* nation (the "Seed" people) has a divine (cosmic) mission to regenerate humanity from its ruins, however, not before the ancient king Nimrod returns from the stars to eradicate the depravity and corruption of the contemporary world (as in another narrative, king Attila should have done with ancient Rome, a task at which he failed[143]).

The authors and believers of new national mythologies integrate and "re-ethnicise" alien and apocalyptic elements from the contemporary global cultic milieu and New Age popular culture to endow the Hungarian nation with sacredness, giving it a cosmic significance. They often do so taking on the risk of being ridiculed and harshly criticised not only by the representatives of academic science or mainstream churches, but even by their fellow, more traditional Turanist or Sumerologist compatriots. We may ask: Why? Multiple answers present themselves. The same processes and similar cosmic mythologies develop and unfold in the neighbouring nations (most often directed against each other),[144] in a Girardian sense of mimetic rivalry.[145] There is a growing general public resentment and distrust[146] towards both academic science and the official churches (together with an aversion towards the political and economic establishment—again, in the entirety of Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe, but also worldwide). Both phenomena point to further, deeper explanations: academic science and official churches are seen as servants of foreign interests, either of inimical nations, and/or of greater regional or global powers. In the case of new Hungarian national mythologies and cosmic religiousness, historical sciences are felt as dominated by occult Western (or Eastern) forces (Austrian, Soviet, Anglo-Saxon), Christianity is considered too Jewish and/or too Roman (ruled and distorted by Jews, the Vatican, or even America) and in no way authentic and serving the real interests of the nation. Finally, in the eyes of the adherents of national neomythology, modern historical sciences and the universalist message and nature of Christianity (together with secularisation) deprive the nation of its most essential value: sacrality. Re-mythologisation, with all its means, serves exactly this purpose: to restore the lost sacred nature of the history, destiny, and *raison d'être* of the ethnic community.

As Róbert Szűcs, the editor-in-chief of the *Hihetetlen! Magazin*, puts it in the foreword of the first special issue dedicated to "20.000 years of Hungarian history," explaining the reason for compiling the compendium of Hungarian neomythology:

111
György Kisfaludy (1944–) an electronist technician by training, established the religious congregation and national community of the Huns in 1991, in Budapest, as a scientific debate club (see the Wikipedia article cited above). He claims dozens of groundbreaking technical inventions, published online several treatises on the mystical nature and science of the gravitational waves, the cosmic consciousness, e.g., *A teremtés üzenete* (The message of creation) 1991; *A téridő kulcsa: a tudat* (The key to space-time: The consciousness) n.d., *Az energia titka* (The mystery of energy) n.d. He also maintains a YouTube channel titled *Ataisz titkai* (The mysteries of Atais) with more than ten thousand followers, containing 932 videos of his lectures, accessed since 2007, https://www.youtube.com/@ataisz_titkai/videos.

112
A reference to the *Arvisura*, which they maintain as sacred scripture, and organise their holidays in accordance with it.

113
Greeting messages from http://hunok.hu/egyhaz/index1.html, accessed 3rd April 2023; http://hunok.hu/startlapok/ujstartlap.html, accessed 3rd April 2023. It must be noted, that the *Hunok.hu* website of the church has been unavailable since October 2022 (retrieved here through the *Wayback Machine* Internet archive on 25th July 2023).

114
See Szilárdi Réka, "Neopaganism in Hungary: Under the spell of roots," in *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Kaarina Aitamurto and Scott Simpson (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 230–48.

115
Szilárdi, "Neopaganism."

116
Essential articles interpreting the Pilis-phenomenon: Povedák, István, "From Attila to the Heart Chakra: Postmodern pilgrimages," *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 59, no. 1 (2013): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1556/AEthn.2013.001. Also see Judit Kis-Halas, " 'Haragudtam az angyalokra, hogy átb*sztak' Angyalkultusz és UFO-vallás," in *Tapasztalatból hallottam . . . Alternatív világképek: Összeesküvés- elméletek társadalomtudományi elemzése*, ed. István Povedák and László-Attila Hubbes, (Budapest: MTA-SzTE, 2018), 191–216. English version: Kis-Halas, Judit, " 'I was Angry with the Angels for F*cking Me Over.' Angel-cult and UFO-religion in Hungary," in *Faith, Doubt and Knowledge in Religious Thinking*, ed. Pócs Éva and Vidacs Bea (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2020), 327–52.

117
Accessed 3rd April 2023, http://hajnalhasadas.hupont.hu/149/sziriusz-kapcsolat-12.

118
The Paulines are invested in the new mythology with a mysterious aura: they had been the White "Táltos" (Shaman) priests, secret keepers of the hidden ancient wisdom of the Pagan Magyars, persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church. See Povedák, István, "A szerzetes és a fehér táltos: A pálos újmitológiától a magyar

újmitológiáig," (The monk and the white Táltos: From the Pauline neomythology to the Hungarian neomythology) in *Aranykapu - Tanulmányok Pozsony Ferenc tiszteletére*, ed. Albert Zsolt Jakab and István Kinda (Kolozsvár: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság, Szabadtéri Néprajzi Múzeum, Székely Nemzeti Múzeum, 2015), 711–24.

119 Aradi Lajos, "A MáGia uRainak nyomai, avagy mit tesz az, aki a nyomkövetők nyomában morzsát keres . . ." (Traces of the Lords of MaGick, or what does one do looking for crumbles in the trail of trackers…), *MAGOK vagyunk* (blog), 25th May 2010, http://magokvagyunk.blogspot.com/2010/05/aradi-lajos-magia-urainak-nyomai.html.

120 Povedák, "From Attila."

121 Miklós, Attila, *Attila könyve* (Attila's Book) (private edition, 2018) accessed 3rd April 2023, https://attilahun.hu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/attila_konyve.pdf. There are several other similar works and an entire series of an online UFO journal: *Titok magazin* (Mystery magazine) edited by Attila himself (18 issues since 2020) on his personal website: accessed 3rd April 2023, https://attilahun.hu/.

122 Czimbalmas Tivadar's *Őshaza* (Ancestral home) "documentary film" series on YouTube, accessed July 2014, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFCAD2E30057D0F4F, which was presented later even on various TV channels. See also Bencze Mihály, "A pallagkultúra és a Barcaság" (The Pallag culture and the Barcaság region), *Hétfalu* vol. XVIII, no. 4(613) (2012): 3–4.

123 Semir Osmanagić, Bosnian-American amateur archaeologist identified in 2005 the Visočica hill near Visoko town in Bosnia, as a 34,000-year-old pyramid. See Sam Osmanagich, *Bosnian Pyramids: My Story* (Sarajevo, "Archaelogical park: Bosnian pyramid of the sun" Foundation, 2019).

124 Klára Friedrich and Gábor Szakács, "Comparison between sign-systems," trans. Zoltán Fábry, *Rovasírás Forrai* website: accessed 3rd April 2023, http://www.rovasirasforrai.hu/Forditasok/Comparison-between-sign-systems.htm#fk. They have authored several publications on the issue of ancient Hungarian runic writing, the most popular of which is Klára Friedrich and Gábor Szakács: *Tászok-tetõtõl a bosnyák piramisokig* (From the Tászok-peak to the Bosnian pyramids), (Budapest: self-pub., 2007).

125 *A Világ Titkai*, "A boszniai piramisok: idegen struktúrák lehetnek a belsejükben: titkos Tesla technológia" (The Bosnian Pyramids: There might be alien structures hidden within them: A secret Tesla-technology), accessed 20th November 2020, https://avilagtitkai.com/articles/view/a-boszniai-piramisok-idegen-strukturak-lehetneka-belsejukben-titkos-tesla-technologia.

> "We should finally face up to our past. The past that they have always wanted to take away from us and that they have constantly falsified. We know that the Finno-Ugric theory is bleeding from a thousand wounds and that there is a wealth of evidence to disprove it, but the authorities simply ignore these explanations. Let's not forget that these alternative theories are not the "fantasies" of amateur authors, but the works of highly erudite historians who devoted their entire lives to researching the past of the Hungarian people! Therefore, they cannot be simply swept off the table with a casual gesture."[147]

The fantastic, mythopoeic nature of these narratives are advocated by Tamás Bolyki in a tone that is as accusatory as it is apologetic, in the introductory article of the same issue, considering them a positive phenomenon, which reflect the deep interest of the non-professional public in scientific issues, including Hungarian prehistory:

> "These alternative theories often stray into the realm of fantasy. This, of course, inadvertently encourages the representatives of the official position, who then immediately stigmatise any theory that does not agree with theirs as ridiculous and amateurish [. . .] So those who confuse prehistory research with science fiction or fantasy do more harm to the cause of alternative research for the ancestral home than they realize: they are the reason why academic scientists want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. *On the other hand:* What right do we have to say that an alternative theory of Hungarian (history) is 'too fantastic' simply because it sounds shocking to us (today)? After all, there have been several occasions in the past when a particular idea, declared impossible by the contemporaries, has been proven to be true [. . .] If we look at the history of mankind, we realise that no one has the moral right to label a theory as impossible just because he or she does not believe it or cannot imagine it."[148]

126
Alex Imreh, "Similarity between Vinca, Hungarian Runic signs and signs found inside the Bosnian Pyramids, older than Egypt pyramids," *Alex Imreh* (blog), 5th January 2011, https://aleximreh.wordpress.com/2011/01/05/similarity-between-vinca-hungarian-runic-signs-and-signs-found-inside-the-bosnian-pyramids-older-than-egypt-pyramids/; and a video inserted as comment: accessed 3rd April 2023, https://youtu.be/oRj4lWOcarI.

127
László Izsáky, "Az aranykoporsó titka" (The secret of the golden coffin), in *És akkor jöttek az UFO-k . . . Magyarországra*, ed. László Dalia, Anikó Tarpai S. and Judit Trethon (Budapest: Kolibri, 1990), 165–74, accessed 3rd April 2023, https://www.facebook.com/izsakylaszloesazerdelyiaranylemezekemlekoldal/; the golden plates are presented in László Izsáky, "Interszteller kapcsolatok" (Interstellar connections), *Ufómagazin* (October 1997): 34–37, digitised online: accessed 3rd April 2023, https://vandortuz.blog.hu/2020/02/24/izsaky_laszlo_intersztellaris_kapcsolatok#. A volume published from Izsáky's writings: László Izsáky, *Más lakott világok: A teremtés hat napja* (Other populated worlds: Six days of the creation), ed. Ferenc Előry Szabó and Ferenc Előri Szabó (Körmend: Körmendi Kulturális Műhely, 2016).

128
See Zsuzsanna Éva Perlaki, *A jel: Sikeres ufólehívás a Kakastaréjnál* (The sign: Successful UFO calling at the Kakastaréj rock), (Meridián könyvek I, 2018) and Zsuzsanna Éva Perlaki, *Ősi rovásjelek az erdélyi aranylemezeken* (Ancient rune signs on the Transylvanian golden tablets), (Meridián könyvek II, 2020). Also see her blog *Gondolatok az égbolt alól* (Thoughts from under the skies), accessed 3rd April 2023, https://vandortuz.blog.hu/ and the Izsáky memorial profile created by her on Facebook account: accessed 3rd April 2023, https://www.facebook.com/izsakylaszloesazerdelyiaranylemezekemlekoldal/.

129
Miklós, *Attila*, 53.

130
Géza Kisteleki, *Az aranylemezek üzenete: Üzenet a Szíriuszról* (The message of the golden plates: Message from Sirius) (Budapest: Angyali Menedék kiadó, 2016).

131
Kisteleki, *Az Aranylemezek*.

132
Klára Sándor, *Nyelvrokonság és hunhagyomány: Rénszarvas vagy csodaszarvas? Nyelvtörténet és művelődéstörténet* (Language kinship and Hun tradition: Reindeer or miraculous deer? Historical linguistics and cultural history) (Budapest: Typotex, 2011), 45–58.

133
The 1999 radio interview recording transcript, accessed 3rd April 2023, https://www.facebook.com/notes/nevem-sincs-csoport/bartha-gizella-kapcsolata-a-sz%C3%ADriuszi-magyar-bolyg%C3%B3val/580470992030260/ (2014), and video recordings of Gizella Bartha's 2003 public lecture titled "A szíriuszi magyar kapcsolatok és St. Germain beavatási rendszere" (The Hungarian connections with Sirius and the initiating system of St. Germain) are quite popular on YouTube, accessed 3rd April 2023, pt. 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLYVuJI0NTk, 44K views, accessed 3rd April 2023, pt. 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j98MFtAo6nA, 28K views.

134
Kis-Halas, "I was angry." For the angels and demons identified as aliens see also Partridge, "Alien Demonology."

135
Kis-Halas, "I was angry," 342.

136
László Koppány Csáji, "A Szentlélektől az ufókig: Küszöbnarratívák, diskurzusterek és diskurzushorizontok egy Kárpát-medencei új vallási mozgalomban" (From the Holy Spirit to UFOs: Threshold narratives, discourse patterns, and discourse horizons in a new religious movement in the Carpathian Basin) *AntroPort online,* 27th August 2015, http://www.antroport.hu/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Csáji-László-A-Szentlélektől-az-ufókig.pdf, László Koppány Csáji, "Az online cédrus árnyéka: Őstörténeti narratívák és értékek keveredése vallási diskurzusokkal egy kortárs etno-pogány csoport online és offline kommunikációjának példáján" (The shadow of the online cedar: The intermingling of prehistoric narratives and values with religious discourses in the online and offline communication of a contemporary Ethno-Pagan group.) in *Már a múlt sem a régi . . . Az új magyar mitológia multidiszciplináris elemzése*, ed. László-Attila Hubbes and István Povedák (Szeged: MAKAT—MoMiMű, 2015), 184–206.

137
See the earlier referred Fehérné Lendvay, *MAGOK vagyunk*, Gábor, *A Magyarok Tudása*, Váradi-Kalmár-Kálmánchey, *Amagdala.*

138
Hubbes, "Rhetoric of healing."

139
See Szedlacsik, "Attila."

140
The article connects the eschatological role of Nimrod and Hungarians at the End times with a historical and biblical apocalyptic role attributed to them: *Western sources repeatedly also say of our ancestors who were raiding in the 10th century that the Hungarians were sent by God as a punishment, and also to trigger with their appearance the beginning of a more moral age. It can be seen that the apocalyptic role has long been associated with the Hun-Hungarians, the background of which is an even older prophecy: the famous prophecy of Gog and Magog* (Avatara) (Bácsfi, Boglárka Diána) 'Nimród visszatér' (Nimrod returns), *Hihetetlen! Magazin: A magyarság 20.000 éves történelme* 4 (2017), accessed 3rd April 2023, https://www.facebook.com/Hihetetlen.Magazin/posts/17925465874-73401/, also as a video lecture: accessed 3rd April 2023, http://megoldaskapu.hu/avatara-eloadasainak-gyujtemenye/avatara-nimrod-visszater.

141
József Kántor, "Eltitkolt ősi próféciák a végítéletről: a Hun-Magyarság Népéről" (Concealed ancient prophecies about the final judgement: About the nation of Hun-Magyars), *NapHun*, 8th December 2017, https://web.archive.org/web-/20190711064323/http://naphun.blogspot.com/2017/12/eltitkolt-osi-profeciak-vegiteletrol.html.

142
Cf. Michael Barkun, "Improvisational millennialism," in *A culture.*

143
Szedlacsik, "Attila."

144
See Alexe, *Dacopatia*; as well as Hubbes and Povedák, "Competitive pasts"; Povedák and Hubbes, "New national."

145
René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2009).

146
Hilde Weiss, "A cross-national comparison of nationalism in Austria, the Czech and Slovak republics, Hungary, and Poland," *Political Psychology* 24, no. 2 (2003): 377–401, https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00332.

147
Szűcs Róbert, "Magyarság" (Hungarians), *Hihetetlen! Magazin. A magyarság 20.000 éves történelme* 1, no. 3 (September–November 2012).

148
Tamás Bolyki, "Kozmikus eredetünk" (Our cosmic origins), *Hihetetlen! Magazin: A magyarság 20.000 éves történelme* 1, no. 5-8 (September–November 2012): 5.

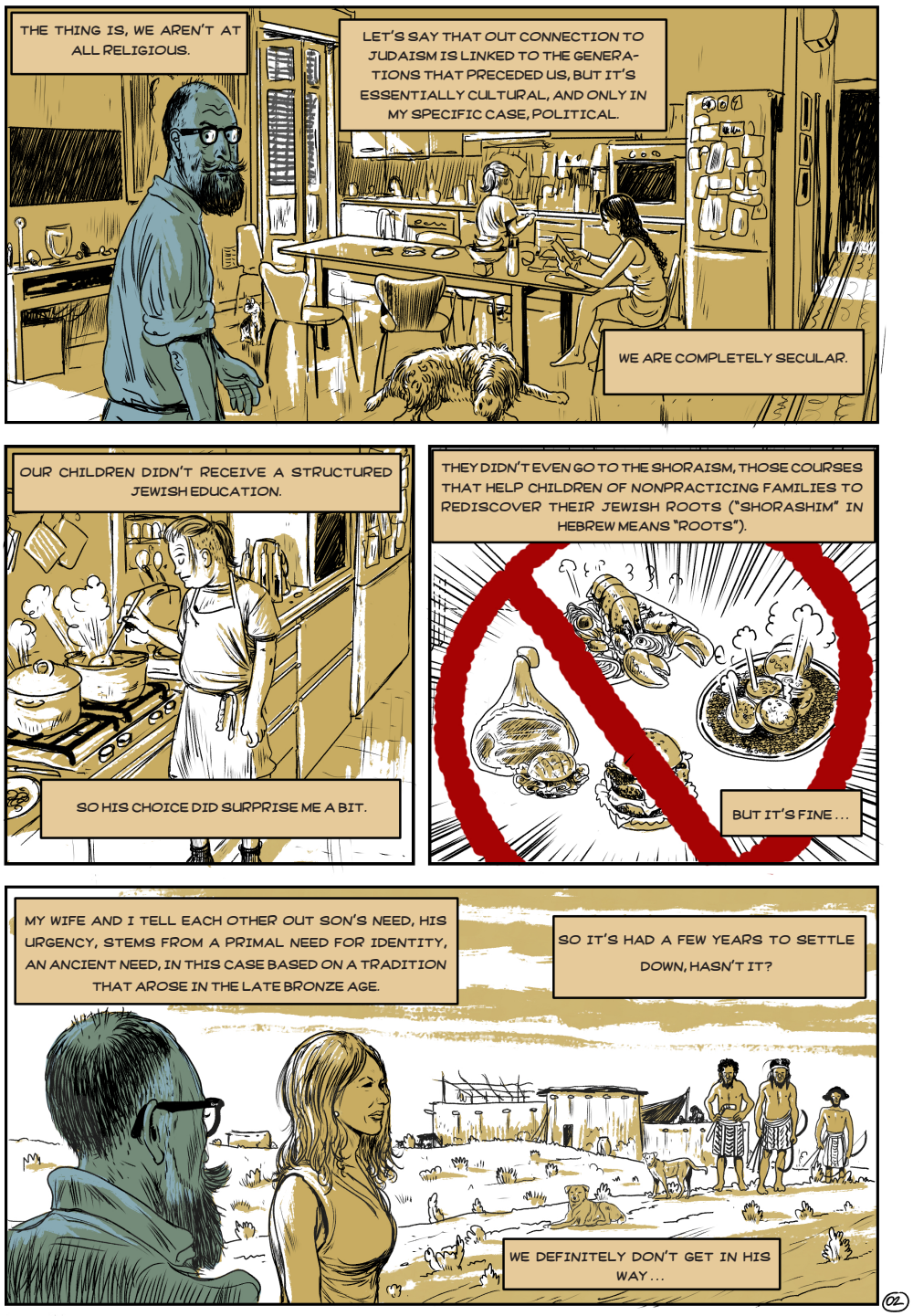
Heterography:

Ich hob geheulemt ein houlem

Giorgio Albertini

Centro Studi
di Civiltà e Spiritualità
Comparate
fondazione
Giorgio Cini onlus


A FEW MONTHS AGO, MY SON, THE YOUNGEST ONE, SAID TO ME:
STARTING TODAY I'M EATING KOSHER!
HE WASN'T ASKING ME, HE WAS SIMPLY LETTING ME KNOW.
ICH HOB GEHOULEMT EIN HOULEM
I, HOWEVER, REMINDED HIM THAT FOLLOWING A REAL KASHRUT IS PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE IF YOU'RE NOT PREPARED FOR IT, AND IF THE SPACE ISN'T PREPARED FOR IT, AS IN OUR HOME.
BUT HE REPLIED:
I'LL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO FOLLOW IT.
AND THAT'S WAHT HE ACTUALLY DID.
(I DREAMED A DREAM)


THE THING IS, WE AREN'T AT ALL RELIGIOUS.
LET'S SAY THAT OUT CONNECTION TO JUDAISM IS LINKED TO THE GENERATIONS THAT PRECEDED US, BUT IT'S ESSENTIALLY CULTURAL, AND ONLY IN MY SPECIFIC CASE, POLITICAL.
WE ARE COMPLETELY SECULAR.
OUR CHILDREN DIDN'T RECEIVE A STRUCTURED JEWISH EDUCATION.
SO HIS CHOICE DID SURPRISE ME A BIT.
THEY DIDN'T EVEN GO TO THE SHORAISM, THOSE COURSES THAT HELP CHILDREN OF NONPRACTICING FAMILIES TO REDISCOVER THEIR JEWISH ROOTS ("SHORASHIM" IN HEBREW MEANS "ROOTS").
BUT IT'S FINE...
MY WIFE AND I TELL EACH OTHER OUT SON'S NEED, HIS URGENCY, STEMS FROM A PRIMAL NEED FOR IDENTITY, AN ANCIENT NEED, IN THIS CASE BASED ON A TRADITION THAT AROSE IN THE LATE BRONZE AGE.
SO IT'S HAD A FEW YEARS TO SETTLE DOWN, HASN'T IT?
WE DEFINITELY DON'T GET IN HIS WAY...
02


BUT I DID REALLY WANT HIM TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE RELATIONSHIP TO JUDAISM IS SOMETHING DIFFERENT FOR ME...
IT IS MAINLY CONNECTED TO THE IDEA OF AN EGALITARIAN DREAM THAT HAS LITTLE TO DO WITH RELIGION.
TO EXPLAIN THIS, I TAKE HIM FOR A WALK.
BUT WHERE ARE WE?
IN TEL AVIV
AND HOW DID WE GET HERE?
WITH VOLITION
DO YOU WANT SOMETHING TO DRINK?
MMM... AN ALCOHOL-FREE MOJITO...


I DON'T KNOW IF THEY HAVE THAT...
WE AREN'T IN MILAN
GET A "LEMONANA" ... IT'S GOOD, IT'S KOSHER
(I KNOW HIS WEAKNESSES)
OK
FRESH JUICE
TODARABA
I'LL EXPLAIN ...
...YOU HAVE TO DISTINGUISH THE PRESENT WORLD FROM THE MESSIANIC ONE...


IN MY TIME, THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL HAD TO SUBMIT QUIETLY TO THE VARIOUS NATIONS, BUT THE MESSIAH'S COMING WILL CHANGE EVERYTHING.
HAS THIS MESSIAH ARRIVED? IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE IT TO ME...
YOU SEE . . . LISTEN, MEDIEVAL IDEAS, AS I ALWAYS SAY...
JUDAISM IS A SICKNESS THAT YOU WOULDN'T WISH ON YOUR WORST ENEMY... AND THIS HERZL AND HIS FRIENDS ACTUALLY WANT TO CREATE A COUNTRY FOR JEWS... WHICH MEANS PRESERVING AND PROPAGATING SAID SICKNESS...
BUT WHO ARE, THEY?
THE ONE WITH THE TURBAN IS MAAIMONIDE . . . DOCTOR, RABBI, AND PHILOSOPHER OF THE 12TH CENTURY... A GREAT SCHOLAR.
THE OTHER ONE, THE BIG-HAIRED GUY, IS HEINRICH HEINE, BOTH A POET AND PHILOSOPHER . . . THE GREATEST OF THE GERMANS IN THE GENERATION THAT CAME AFTER GOETHE...
HEINE, YOU ARE A WICKED MODERNIST BUT DEFINITELY LESS CRAZY THAN THIS HERZL WHO WANTS TO DESTROY EVERYTHING WITH HIS IDEA OF THE SECULAR JEW...
LET'S FOLLOW THEM... THAT'S MORITZ STEINSCHNEIDER
AREN'T THEY HOT... DRESSED LIKE THAT?


WHEN HE CAME TO ME TO DEFEND HIS IDEA, I CALLED HIM "A KILLER."
I EXPLICITLY TOLD HIM THAT IF I SUBSCRIBED TO HIS IDEAS, WE WOULD HAVE JUST NEEDED TO PREPARE A WORTHY BURIAL FOR THESE TREASURES...
YOU ARE INSUFFERABLE, WITH YOUR MIDDLE CLASS SENTIMENT AND YOUR NEED TO PRESERVE YOUR IDENTITY... THE ONLY IDENTITY I SEE HERE IS THAT OF CLASS...
AND WE WANT A CLASSLESS SOCIETY WITHOUT CLASS, A STATE WITHOUT CLASSES, WHERE NO RELIGIOUS SPECIFICITY WILL HAVE SPECIAL RIGHTS OR PRIVILEGES.
HEY! I KNOW THIS ONE... HE'S MARX
IF HERZL AND HIS PEOPLE ARE INTERESTED IN A NEW MAN THAT CAN JOIN OUR UNIVERSAL MOVEMENT...
THERE CANNOT BE A NEW KIND OF JEW WITHOUT COMPLETE OSMOSIS WITH THE REST OF HUMANITY.
THAT'S TROTSKY, A FRIEND, WELL, A FOLLOWER...
YOU SETTLE IT LIKE THIS... THE STROKE OF A BRUSH AND WE HAVE THE NEW MAN. AS FOR THE JEWISH QUESTION, OR ANY OTHER ETHNIC ISSUE, YOU CAN'T RESOLVE THEM BY STARTING A REVOLUTION...


AFTER ALL, WE SAW HOW IT WENT ... THE MASSES OF EX-PARIAHS YOU WANT TO GIVE POLITICAL AWARENESS AND UNIONISATION TO HAVE TO PRESERVE WHAT MAKES THEM WHO THEY ARE, I.E., JEWS.
AT THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY, VLADIMIR MEDEM FOUNDED THE BUND, THE GENERAL FEDERATION OF JEWISH WORKERS.
I'M COMPLETELY LOST ... AND I'VE FINISHED THE "LIMONANA".
WHAT I CAN SAY IS THAT I LOVE JEWS, ALL JEWS, WITH ONE EXCEPTION: ZIONISTS. WHAT IRRITATES ME THE MOST IN THESE SCOUNDRELS IS THAT THEY BELIEVE IN THE SEARCH FOR HAPPINESS ...
THERE ... YOU HEARD IT ... THAT'S THE POINT!
WHAT? I DIDN'T GET IT ...
GOOD EVENING!


I HEARD YOU COMMENTING AND EXCHANGING OPINIONS, WHICH I FOUND FASCINATING. PLEASE ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF: DR. THEODOR HERZL, PLAYWRIGHT, PARIS CORRESPONDENT OF THE NEUE FREE PRESSE, AND PRESIDENT OF THE ZIONIST EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.
I WOULD LIKE TO RECTIFY SOME OF YOUR STATEMENTS AND DEMONSTRATE THAT YOUR CRITICISM DOESN'T HAVE A FACTUAL BASIS... THIS IS ALL DUE TO A SMALL JEWISH FLAW, WHICH CONSISTS IN BELIEVING THAT QUESTIONS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANSWERS. THIS IS ESSENTIALLY WHAT I WANTED TO TELL YOU...
AS IN...?
I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING OF WHAT THESE PEOPLE WERE TALKING ABOUT...
OF COURSE... THE ISSUE IS SO COMPLICATED THAT COMMENTS ALWAYS COME OUT AS TOO SUBTLE AND CONTRADICTORY.
AND SO, EVERYTHING IS MORE OBSCURE AND MYSTERIOUS THAN WHAT WE THINK...
LET ALONE EXPLICABLE IT IN A FEW SHORT COMIC PAGES...
NONETHELESS, THAT MAN'S THOUGHT, HIS ABILITY TO WEAVE TOGETHER VARIOUS IDEAS, IS STILL A BEACON FOR UNDERSTANDING TODAY'S JUDAISM...

"MODERN ISRAEL IS NOT HERTZL'S UTOPIA, NOR THE IDEAL AS ESTABLISHED BY THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. ISRAEL HAS MADE SOME MISTAKES; IN PARTICULAR, THE OCCUPATION OF ANOTHER PEOPLE, FOR 55 YEARS. YET ISRAEL HAS CREATED SOMETHING UNIQUE, FLOURISHING, WITH ITS OWN CHARACTER ... EVEN THOUGH IT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN ON A RAZOR'S EDGE FOR 75 YEARS.

DAVID GROSSMAN, APRIL 1ST, 2023

Part of this text is inspired by the introduction to "The imaginary voyage with Theodor Herzl in Israel" by Simon Peres

A few words about Giorgio Albertini

Giorgio Albertini was born in Milan in 1968. After studying medieval history at the University of Milan, he participated in archaeological excavation campaigns with European institutions and universities, devoting himself to the archaeology of architecture and the graphic restitution of archaeological sites. He came to focus on a process of graphic synthesis, within a larger historical and archaeological context, which involves reconstructive drawings that concentrate an immense amount of information inside a single frame that is immediately usable by all. He currently alternates between working as a scientific illustrator at publishing houses, universities, and museums in Italy and abroad, and as an essayist and author. His scientific works include the layouts of the prehistory and protohistory section at the National Archaeological Museum in Naples in 2020, and the layouts of the Classis Ravenna - Museum of the City and Territory of Classe in Ravenna from 2018 to 2023. Since 1996, he has been collaborating with magazines such as *Medioevo*, *Archeo*, *Archeologia Viva*, *National Geographic Magazine*, *BBC History*, *Focus*, *Focus Storia*, *Focus Wars*, *Bell'Italia*, *Bell'Europa*, *Airone*, *Le monde de la Bible*, *Ancient Warfare*, and *Medieval Warfare,* dealing mainly with medieval and ancient architecture and archaeological reconstruction. From 2008 to 2012, he taught "New Languages of Contemporary Art" at the European Academy of Fine Arts and Media in Milan; since 2013 he has been teaching "Artistic Anatomy" and "Elements of Morphology and Dynamics of Form" at the same university. In 2019 he was awarded the Giulio Romano Prize (Contemporary Design, "In a New and Extravagant Way") at the Ducal Palace Museum Complex in Mantua. His artworks were shown in a solo exhibition in 2018 at the Comics Art Museum in Brussels. He was chosen by the Belgian publishing house Casterman to draw the new volumes of the famous comic series *Alix* in collaboration with David B. Created by Jacques Martin in 1948, *Alix* is set in the ancient world during the age of Caesar. His latest book is the fictionalised graphic biography of sixteenth-century Florentine traveller Francesco Carletti. Also published by Casterman, it is entitled *Carletti. Un voyageur moderne* (Carletti. A modern voyager).

Bibliography

Decio, with Giampiero Casertano, ReNoir, 2008.

L'ultima battaglia dei templari. Hattin e la caduta di Gerusalemme, Newton Compton Editori, 2012.

I giorni che hanno fatto l'Italia, Newton Compton Editori, 2014.

"Sfessania," in *Papier*, Edition Delcourt, 2014.

"Flaubert au Travail", in *Pandora*, Casterman, 2016.

Lune de miel à l'age du bronze, Chronosquad I, with Gregory Panaccione, Edition Delcourt, 2016.

Destination Révolution. Dernier appel, Chronosquad II, with Gregory Panaccione, Edition Delcourt, 2016.

Poulet et cervelle de paon à la romaine, Chronosquad III, with Gregory Panaccione, Edition Delcourt, 2016.

Concerto en La mineur pour timbales et grosses têtes, Chronosquad IV, with Gregory Panaccione, Edition Delcourt, 2016.

Veni Vidi Vici, with David B., Casterman, 2018.

Vie éternelle mode d'emploi, Chronosquad V, with Gregory Panaccione, Edition Delcourt, 2019.

Leonardo Da Vinci. Il rinascimento dei morti, with Giovanni Gualdoni and Giuseppe Staffa, Newton Compton Editori, 2019.

Le dieu sans nom, with David B., Casterman, 2020.

Chapeaux Melons et Hordes de Huns, Chronosquad VI, with Gregory Panaccione, Edition Delcourt, 2021.

"La Maschera di Kanji," in *Inoki*, Tentacle, 2023.

Carletti. Un voyageur moderne, Casterman, 2023.

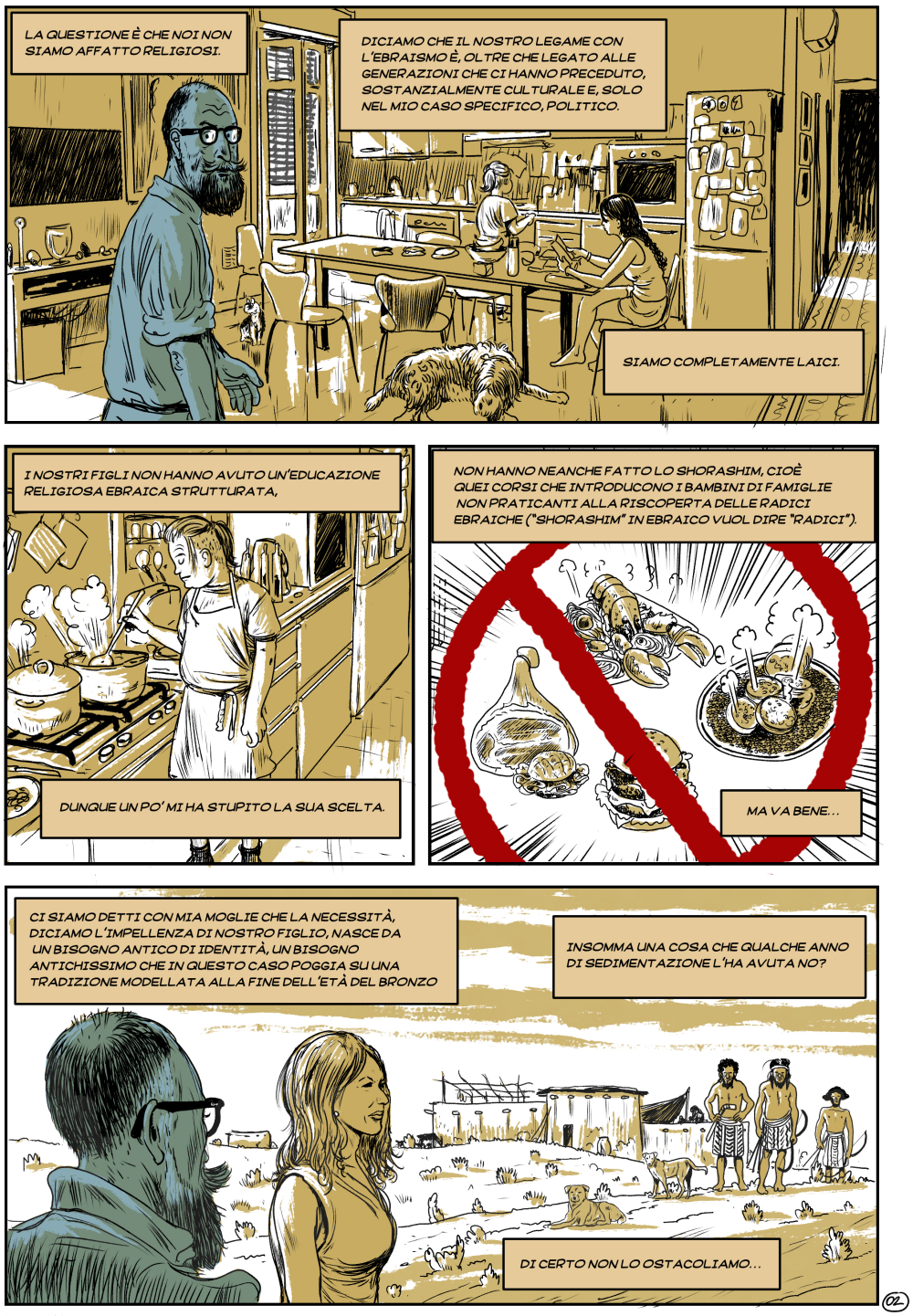
Heterography:

Ich hob geheulemt ein houlem

Giorgio Albertini

Centro Studi
di Civiltà e Spiritualità
Comparate
fondazione
Giorgio Cini onlus


QUALCHE MESE FA MIO FIGLIO, IL PIÙ PICCOLO, MI HA DETTO:
DA OGGI IO MANGIO KASHER!
NON MI STAVA CHIEDENDO NULLA, SEMPLICEMENTE MI INFORMAVA.
ICH HOB GEHOULEMT EIN HOULEM
GLI HO COMUNQUE FATTO PRESENTE CHE SEGUIRE UNA VERA KHASHERUT È PRATICAMENTE IMPOSSIBILE IN UN CONTESTO CHE NON È PREPARATO A FARLO, COME CASA NOSTRA.
MA LUI HA RISPOSTO:
FARÒ IL POSSIBILE PER SEGUIRLA...
...COSÌ HA IN EFFETTI FATTO.
01
(HO SOGNATO UN SOGNO)


LA QUESTIONE È CHE NOI NON SIAMO AFFATTO RELIGIOSI.
DICIAMO CHE IL NOSTRO LEGAME CON L'EBRAISMO È, OLTRE CHE LEGATO ALLE GENERAZIONI CHE CI HANNO PRECEDUTO, SOSTANZIALMENTE CULTURALE E, SOLO NEL MIO CASO SPECIFICO, POLITICO.
SIAMO COMPLETAMENTE LAICI.
I NOSTRI FIGLI NON HANNO AVUTO UN'EDUCAZIONE RELIGIOSA EBRAICA STRUTTURATA,
DUNQUE UN PO' MI HA STUPITO LA SUA SCELTA.
NON HANNO NEANCHE FATTO LO SHORASHIM, CIOÈ QUEI CORSI CHE INTRODUCONO I BAMBINI DI FAMIGLIE NON PRATICANTI ALLA RISCOPERTA DELLE RADICI EBRAICHE ("SHORASHIM" IN EBRAICO VUOL DIRE "RADICI").
MA VA BENE...
CI SIAMO DETTI CON MIA MOGLIE CHE LA NECESSITÀ, DICIAMO L'IMPELLENZA DI NOSTRO FIGLIO, NASCE DA UN BISOGNO ANTICO DI IDENTITÀ, UN BISOGNO ANTICHISSIMO CHE IN QUESTO CASO POGGIA SU UNA TRADIZIONE MODELLATA ALLA FINE DELL'ETÀ DEL BRONZO
INSOMMA UNA COSA CHE QUALCHE ANNO DI SEDIMENTAZIONE L'HA AVUTA NO?
DI CERTO NON LO OSTACOLIAMO...
02


PERÒ CI TENEVO CHE CAPISSE CHE IL RAPPORTO CON L'EBRAISMO PER ME È ALTRO.
È LEGATO PIÙ ALL'IDEA DI UN SOGNO EGUALITARIO CHE POCO HA A CHE FARE CON LA RELIGIONE.
PER FARLO LO PORTO A FARE UNA PASSEGGIATA.
MA DOVE SIAMO?
A TEL AVIV
E COME CI SIAMO ARRIVATI?
CON LA VOLONTA'
VUOI QUALCOSA DA BERE?
MMM...UN MOJITO ANALCOLICO...

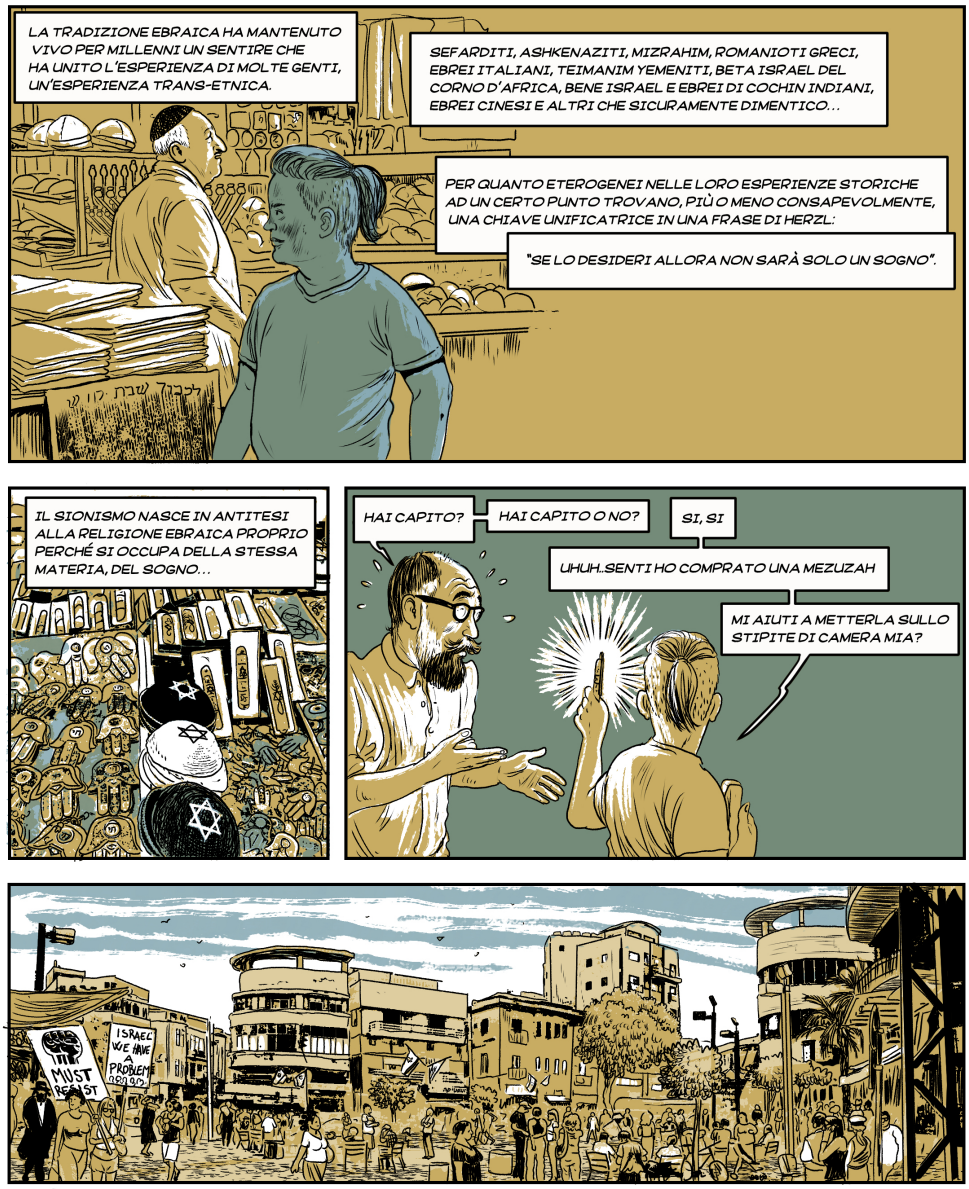

NON SO SE CE L'HANNO...
NON SIAMO A MILANO
PRENDI UNA LIMONANA
...È BUONA, È KASHER
(CONOSCO I SUOI PUNTI DEBOLI)
OK
FRESH JUICE
TODA RABA
VI SPIEGO...
...DOVETE DISTINGUERE IL MONDO PRESENTE DA QUELLO MESSIANICO...


AI MIEI TEMPI ISRAELE, INTESO COME POPOLO, DOVEVA SOTTOMETTERSI DOCILMENTE ALLE NAZIONI MA ALL'AVVENTO DEL MESSIA TUTTO CAMBIERÀ...
È ARRIVATO QUESTO MESSIA? NON MI PARE...
VEDETE...SENTITE, PENSIERI MEDIOEVALI IO LO DICO SEMPRE...
IL GIUDAISMO È MALATTIA CHE NON SI AUGURA NEANCHE AL PEGGIOR NEMICO...E QUESTO HERZL CON I SUOI AMICI VORREBBE ADDIRITTURA FARE UNO STATO DEGLI EBREI...CIOÈ PRESERVARE E PROPAGARE TALE MALATTIA...
MA CHI SONO?
QUELLO COL TURBANTE È MAIMONIDE... MEDICO, RABBINO, GRANDE FILOSOFO DEL XII SECOLO...UN GRANDE SAPIENTE
L'ALTRO, IL CAPELLONE, È HEINRICH HEINE UN POETA, ANCHE LUI FILOSOFO...IL PIÙ GRANDE TRA I TEDESCHI DELLA GENERAZIONE DOPO QUELLA DI GOETHE...
HEINE SEI UNO SCELLERATO MODERNISTA MA SICURAMENTE MENO PAZZO DI QUESTO HERZL CHE VORREBBE DISTRUGGERE TUTTO QUESTO CON LA SUA IDEA DI EBREO LAICO...
SEGUIAMOLI...QUELLO E' MORITZ STEINSCHNEIDER
MA NON HANNO CALDO..VESTITI COSÌ TANTO?


QUANDO È VENUTO DA ME A PERORARE LA SUA IDEA GLI HO DATO "DELL'ASSASSINO",
GLI HO DETTO ESPLICITAMENTE CHE SE SOTTOSCRIVEVO LE SUE IDEE, TUTTO CIÒ DI CUI AVEVAMO BISOGNO SAREBBE STATO PREPARARE UNA DEGNA SEPOLTURA PER QUESTI TESORI...
SIETE INSOPPORTABILI CON IL VOSTRO SENTIRE BORGHESE, CON LA VOSTRA PREOCCUPAZIONE DI PRESERVARE L'IDENTITÀ...QUI L'UNICA IDENTITÀ CHE VEDO È QUELLA DI CLASSE...
E NOI VOGLIAMO UNA SOCIETÀ SENZA CLASSE, UNO STATO SENZA CLASSI DOVE NESSUNA SPECIFICITÀ RELIGIOSA AVRÀ SPECIALI DIRITTI O TANTOMENO PRIVILEGI.
WOOW QUESTO LO CONOSCO...È MARX
SE HERZL E I SUOI SONO INTERESSATI AD UN UOMO NUOVO CHE ADERISCANO AL NOSTRO MOVIMENTO UNIVERSALE...
NON CI PUÒ ESSERE UN NUOVO TIPO DI EBREO SE NON IN UNA CONDIZIONE DI TOTALE OSMOSI CON IL RESTO DELL'UMANITÀ.
QUELLO È TROTSKY, UN AMICO, INSOMMA UN SEGUACE...
VOI LA RISOLVETE COSÌ...UN COLPO DI SPAZZOLA E ABBIAMO L'UOMO NUOVO LA QUESTIONE EBRAICA, O QUALSIASI ALTRA QUESTIONE ETNICA, NON LA RISOLVERETE NEL CONTESTO DELLA RIVOLUZIONE...


CHE POI ABBIAMO VISTO COM'È ANDATA... LE MASSE DI EX-PARIA A CUI VOLETE DARE CONSAPEVOLEZZA POLITICA E SINDACALIZZAZIONE HANNO L'OBBLIGO DI PRESERVARE CIÒ CHE LI RENDE QUELLO CHE SONO, CIOÈ EBREI.
VLADIMIR MEDEM È STATO IL FONDATORE ALLA FINE DELL'800 DEL BUND, LA FEDERAZIONE GENERALE DEI LAVORATORI EBREI.
NON CI CAPISCO PIÙ NIENTE... HO ANCHE FINITO LA LIMONANA
CIÒ CHE POSSO DIRE È CHE AMO GLI EBREI, TUTTI GLI EBREI. CON UN'UNICA ECCEZIONE: I SIONISTI. CIÒ CHE MI IRRITA MAGGIORMENTE DI QUESTI FURFANTI È CHE CREDONO NELLA RICERCA DELLA FELICITÀ...
ECCO...HAI SENTITO...È QUESTO IL PUNTO!!!
COSA? NON HO CAPITO...
BUONA SERA!


HO UDITO I VOSTRI COMMENTI E SCAMBI DI OPINIONI CHE HO TROVATO AFFASCINANTI. PERMETTETE CHE MI PRESENTI: DR. THEODOR HERZL, DRAMMATURGO, CORRISPONDENTE DA PARIGI DELLA NEUE FREIE PRESSE E PRESIDENTE DEL COMITATO ESECUTIVO SIONISTA.
VORREI RETTIFICARE ALCUNE DELLE VOSTRE AFFERMAZIONI E DIMOSTRARE CHE IL VOSTRO CRITICISMO NON HA BASI DI FATTO...QUESTO È TUTTO RELATIVO AD UN PICCOLO DIFETTO EBRAICO CHE CONSISTE NEL CREDERE CHE LE DOMANDE SIANO PIÙ IMPORTANTI DELLE RISPOSTE. QUESTO È ESSENZIALMENTE CIÒ CHE VOLEVO DIRVI...
CIOÈ?...
NON HO CAPITO NULLA DI QUELLO DI CUI PARLANO QUESTI TIZI...
MA SÌ...È OVVIO...LA QUESTIONE È COSÌ COMPLESSA CHE I COMMENTI RISULTANO SEMPRE TROPPO SOTTILI E CONTRADDITORI
E QUINDI TUTTO È SEMPRE PIÙ OSCURO E MISTERIOSO DI QUANTO PENSIAMO...
FIGURIAMOCI RISOLVERLO IN POCHE PAGINE DI FUMETTO...
NON DI MENO IL PENSIERO DI QUELL'UOMO, LA SUA SINTESI, RIMANE UN FARO PER CAPIRE L'EBRAISMO DI OGGI...



"L'ISRAELE MODERNO NON È L'UTOPIA DI HERZL, NE L'IDEALE COME STABILITO DALLA DICHIARAZIONE D'INDIPENDENZA. ISRAELE HA COMMESSO DEGLI ERRORI, IN PARTICOLARE L'OCCUPAZIONE DI UN ALTRO POPOLO PER 55 ANNI. EPPURE ISRAELE HA CREATO QUALCOSA DI UNICO, FIORENTE, CON IL SUO CARATTERE... ANCHE SE SEMBRA DI ESSERE STATI SUL FILO DEL RASOIO PER 75 ANNI."

DAVID GROSSMAN 1 APRILE 2023

Parte di questo testo è ispirato alla prefazione di "The Imaginary Voyage with Theodor Herzl in Israel" di Shimon Peres

Breve biografia

Giorgio Albertini nasce a Milano nel 1968. Dopo gli studi di Storia medievale seguiti all'Università di Milano partecipa a campagne di scavo con istituzioni e università europee dedicandosi all'archeologia dell'architettura e alla restituzione grafica di siti archeologici. Si occupa cioè di un processo di sintesi grafica, all'interno di un più ampio lavoro storico e archeologico, che prevede disegni ricostruttivi che permettono di condensare all'interno di un'unica tavola una immensa quantità di informazioni, immediatamente fruibili a tutti. Alterna l'attività di illustratore scientifico presso case editrici, università e musei italiani ed esteri a quella di saggista e autore. Tra i lavori scientifici ricordiamo gli allestimenti della sezione Preistoria e Protostoria presso il Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli nel 2020 e gli allestimenti del Museo Classis Ravenna – Museo della città e del territorio di Classe dal 2018 al 2023. Dal 1996 collabora con riviste come *Medioevo*, *Archeo*, *Archeologia Viva*, *National Geographic Magazine*, *BBC History*, *Focus*, *Focus Storia*, *Focus Wars*, *Bell'Italia*, *Bell'Europa*, *Airone*, *Le monde de la Bible*, *Ancient Warfare*, *Medieval Warfare* occupandosi soprattutto di architettura medievale e antica e di ricostruzione archeologica. Dal 2008 al 2012 è stato docente di "Nuovi Linguaggi dell'Arte Contemporanea" presso la European Academy of Fine Arts and Media di Milano e dal 2013 è docente di "Anatomia Artistica" e "Elementi di morfologia e dinamica della forma" presso lo stesso ateneo. Nel 2019 è primo classificato al Premio Giulio Romano: Il disegno contemporaneo "con nuova stravagante maniera" del Complesso Museale Palazzo Ducale di Mantova. Le sue tavole sono state esposte nella mostra personale nel 2018 presso il Musée de la Bande Dessinée di Bruxelles. È stato scelto dalla casa editrice belga Casterman per disegnare i nuovi volumi della celebre serie a fumetti *Alix*, creata da Jacques Martin nel 1948 e ambientata nel mondo antico durante l'età di Cesare in collaborazione con David B. Il suo ultimo libro è la biografia romanzata in graphic novel del viaggiatore fiorentino cinquecentesco Francesco Carletti *Carletti. Un voyageur moderne* pubblicato presso lo stesso editore.

Bibliografia

Decio, con Giampiero Casertano, ReNoir, 2008.

L'ultima battaglia dei templari. Hattin e la caduta di Gerusalemme, Newton Compton Editori, 2012.

I giorni che hanno fatto l'Italia, Newton Compton Editori, 2014.

"Sfessania," in *Papier*, Edition Delcourt, 2014.

"Flaubert au Travail," in *Pandora*, Casterman, 2016.

Lune de miel à l'age du bronze, Chronosquad I, con Gregory Panaccione, Edition Delcourt, 2016.

Destination Révolution. Dernier appel, Chronosquad II, con Gregory Panaccione, Edition Delcourt, 2016.

Poulet et cervelle de paon à la romaine, Chronosquad III, con Gregory Panaccione, Edition Delcourt, 2016.

Concerto en La mineur pour timbales et grosses têtes, Chronosquad IV, con Gregory Panaccione, Edition Delcourt, 2016.

Veni Vidi Vici, con David B., Casterman, 2018.

Vie éternelle mode d'emploi, Chronosquad V, con Gregory Panaccione, Edition Delcourt, 2019.

Leonardo Da Vinci. Il rinascimento dei morti, con Giovanni Gualdoni e Giuseppe Staffa, Newton Compton Editori, 2019.

Le dieu sans nom, con David B., Casterman, 2020.

Chapeaux Melons et Hordes de Huns, Chronosquad VI, con Gregory Panaccione, Edition Delcourt, 2021.

"La Maschera di Kanji," in *Inoki*, Tentacle, 2023.

Carletti. Un voyageur moderne, Casterman, 2023.