



Photography in the Third Reich

Art, Physiognomy and Propaganda

EDITED BY CHRISTOPHER WEBSTER



<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

© 2021 Christopher Webster. Copyright of individual chapters is maintained by the chapter's author.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the work; to adapt the work and to make commercial use of the work providing attribution is made to the authors (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Attribution should include the following information:

Christopher Webster (ed.), *Photography in the Third Reich: Art, Physiognomy and Propaganda*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0202>

Copyright and permissions for the reuse of many of the images included in this publication differ from the above. This information is provided in the captions and in the list of illustrations

In order to access detailed and updated information on the license, please visit <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0202#copyright>

Further details about CC BY licenses are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>

Digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0202#resources>

Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-78374-914-0

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-78374-915-7

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-78374-916-4

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 978-1-78374-917-1

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 978-1-78374-918-8

ISBN Digital (XML): 978-1-78374-919-5

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0202

Cover image: Erich Retzlaff, *Joseph Goebbels*, 1933, reproduced in Wilhelm Freiherr von Müffling, ed., *Wegbereiter und Vorkämpfer für das neue Deutschland (Pioneers and Champions of the New Germany)* (Munich: J. F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1933), p. 11.

Cover design by Anna Gatti.

5. 'Transmissions from an Extrasensory World'¹

Ethnos and Mysticism in the Photographic Nexus

Christopher Webster

*How far, since then, the ocean streams
Have swept us from that land of dreams,
That land of fiction and of truth,
The lost Atlantis of our youth!*²

Introduction

In contrast to the increasingly lurid scholarly research on the broader subject of the 'Nazi Occult' that has appeared since the end of the Second World War, the relationship to mythic occult currents and esoteric themes in the photography of Ethnos³ in National Socialist Germany has not been examined in any great depth. However, recent scholarship has confirmed that there were indeed powerful esoteric (as well as exoteric) occult currents that undoubtedly influenced the cultural mythos of National Socialist Germany. This influence

-
- 1 *Erste Gesamtausstellung der Werke von Fidus zu seinem 60. Geburtstage* (First complete exhibition of the works of Fidus for his 60th birthday) (Woltersdorf bei Erkner: Fidus-Verlag, 1928), p. 9.
 - 2 From the frontispiece dedication to George Washington Green, in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Ultima Thule* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1880).
 - 3 As noted in the introduction to this volume, I use 'Ethnos' as a summary term for this ethnically driven approach to (in particular) the autochthonous peasant and other 'people of the soil'.

included the photographic portfolios of Ethnos that were developed for propaganda and ideological purposes. Eric Kurlander's definitive work *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (2017) explores this influence in Austria and Germany, arising as it did from a late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century paranormal milieu, as well as how this influence continued to play a part in what Kurlander terms the 'Supernatural Imaginary' throughout the era of the Third Reich itself.

As Kurlander explained:

From cosmopolitan Berlin to Catholic Munich, from Saxony to Schleswig-Holstein thousands of Germans flooded to seances, astrologers, tarot readers, parapsychological experiments, occult bookstores and even esoteric schools and university courses... the sheer size and diversity of the occult marketplace in Germany and Austria suggests that it tapped into a mass consumer culture that was unique in depth and breadth when compared to other countries. Berlin and Munich alone were home to thousands of spiritualists, mediums and astrologers who appealed to tens and perhaps hundreds of thousands of consumers.⁴

Kurlander's intelligent work builds upon a slim but significant corpus of scholarly works that have dealt with this topic and its influence (or otherwise) on the origins and direction of National Socialism itself.⁵ Kurlander, who has written the preface to this volume, described how this influence in National Socialist Germany, this 'Supernatural Imaginary', was '...a space in which a range of popular esoteric, pseudo-scientific, folklorist, and mythological tropes might be exploited in the

4 Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters, A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 14.

5 See Joscelyn Godwin's *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism and Nazi Survival* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), Thomas Hakl's *Unknown Sources: National Socialism and the Occult* (Sequim: Holmes Publishing Group, 2005) and the classic work of Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany, 1890-1935* (New York: New York University Press, 1992). In addition, there have been, over the last two decades, a growth of scholarly studies focussed on esoterica *in toto* in academia, as well as academically grounded research societies such as the European Society for Studies in Western Esotericism, the American Association for the Study of Esotericism, and the Cambridge Centre for the Study of Esotericism, amongst others. Added to these are the growing number of postgraduate study courses and academic chairs related to Western and Eastern esotericism (for example at the University of Amsterdam, the École pratique des hautes études, Rice University Houston, the University of Groningen and, until 2014, the Essex Centre for the Study of Western Esotericism, led by the late Goodrick-Clarke).

building of ideological consensus across a diverse Nazi Party and all the more eclectic German population'.⁶

This chapter explores how the influence of nineteenth-century *völkisch* and occult currents on National Socialism percolated the mass-reproduced photographic images of Ethnos, with its framing of the German as 'other', and how the National Socialist syncretisation of myth, the occult, science, and art found a nexus in these photographic images. Additionally, as will be seen, the work of influential (if controversial) scholars such as Herman Wirth, and the powerful influence of political institutions such as Heinrich Himmler's *Ahnenerbe*, also played a direct role in forming this visual manifestation of a race apart, with a divine origin in a mythical *Urheimat* in the 'ultimate north'. The allusion to an occult myth of divine forebears in these photographically staged portrayals of the 'Aryan' added to and extended the celebration of a racial type in line with 'race science'. Photographers of Ethnos, such as Erich Retzlaff or Hans Saebens, often incorporated typological approaches that included a *metaphysical* and *esoteric* basis. They used the machine-generated optical and chemical processes of photography to make work that was breaking the bounds of its empirical realm, in a kind of nationalist 'staged' photography, just as cinema did in the interwar period.

Occult Currents

In his 1961 essay 'The Mystical Origins of National Socialism', George L. Mosse explored a 'revolt against positivism' that had formed part of the cultural and semi-religious prelude to the advent of the Third Reich. Part of the powerful attraction of this resistance to aspects of modernity was its setting against the backdrop of a struggle or searching for a national identity in opposition to an emergent globalism. The mysticism evident in the photography of Ethnos was effectively a manifestation in silver of a tradition arising from this 'revolt against positivism', with its emphasis on racial uniqueness. As Mosse further explains:

This German reaction to positivism became intimately bound up with a belief in nature's cosmic life force, a dark force whose mysteries could

6 Eric Kurlander, 'The orientalist roots of National Socialism?', in Eric Kurlander, Joanne Miyang Cho, Douglas T. McGetchin, eds, *Transcultural Encounters between Germany and India* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 164–65.

be understood, not through science, but through the occult. An ideology based on such premises was fused with the glories of an Aryan past, and in turn, that past received a thoroughly romantic and mystical interpretation.⁷

And when ariosophists like Guido von List had adopted this notion, they had further cemented the idea that: 'Nature... the great divine guide and from her flowed the life-force. Whatever was closest to Nature would therefore be closest to the truth... the Aryan past was the most "genuine" manifestation of this inner force.'⁸ Not only was the Aryan hypothesised as being racially purer and culturally less 'tainted', it was very often intimated (and sometimes even overtly asserted) that these historically grounded people were even godlike, descendants of a Hyperborean homeland — a case of *Ex Septentrione Lux* — or the light from the North. This idea had been vociferously posited by racialist and *völkisch* thinkers in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in opposition to the Classical idea that all knowledge was *Ex oriente lux* (out of the east, light). Citing a polygenetic origin of humanity, that is, that humankind did not originate from a single common ancestral stock (such as the modern 'Out of Africa' theory),⁹ some publications in which this photography of Ethnos appeared insinuated that, in addition to the presentation of these country people as exemplars of their nation with 'superior' qualities, that they were in fact a race apart, having a divine origin in the 'ultimate north,' a celestial *Herrenrasse*, a polar 'Master Race'. For example, in the book *Deutsches Volk — Deutsche Heimat* (German People — German Homeland) (1935), produced by the *NS-Lehrerbundes* (the National Socialist teachers association), the image of a dolmen¹⁰

7 George L. Mosse, 'The Mystical Origins of National Socialism', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22:1 (January-March, 1961), 81.

8 Mosse, 'The Mystical Origins of National Socialism' (1961), 84.

9 The theory of a single origin of modern humanity from Africa (a monogenesis) had become the firmly accepted scientific hypothesis by the mid-2000s. It was, however, quite quickly challenged, especially as more and more sophisticated DNA evidence emerged. Some scientists now conclude that humankind's origins are much more complex and, speculatively at least, perhaps do indeed derive from separate emergences in different regions. See for example, Nikhil Swaminathan 'Is the Out of Africa Theory Out?' *Scientific American*, 8 August, 2007, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/is-the-out-of-africa-theory-out/>

10 A dolmen is a single-chamber megalithic tomb.

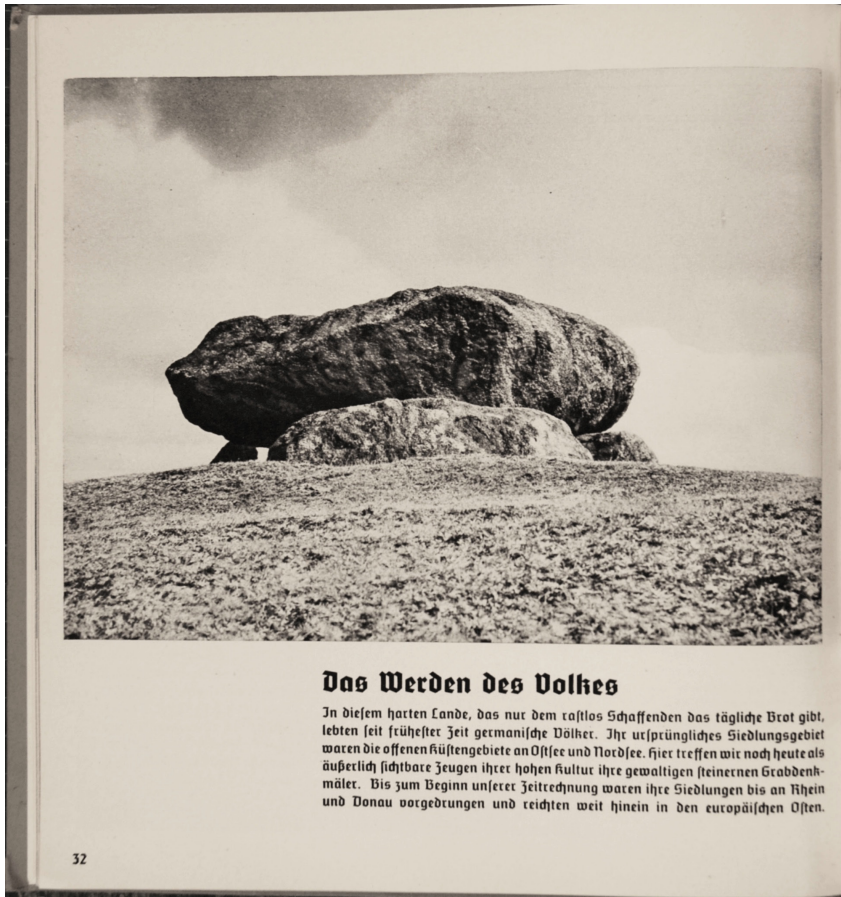


Fig. 5.1 Wilhelm Carl-Mardorf, reproduced in *Deutsches Volk — Deutsche Heimat* (German People — German Homeland) (Bayreuth: Gauverlag Bayerische Ostmark G.m.b.h., 1935), p. 32). Public domain.

is reproduced with a text entitled ‘Das Werden des Volkes’ (The Becoming of the People/Folk). This use of *Werden* suggests, in the Nietzschean sense, the struggle of ‘becoming’. There are no visible links to modernity; rather the timeless presence of the stones, imposed against the sky, are presented to act as reminder of the great age and history of the German people. The burial chamber’s imposing presence is reinforced by the photographer’s use of a simple implied triangle composition. The accompanying text states: ‘Their original settlements were the open coastal areas of the Baltic Sea and the North Sea. Even

today we encounter visible relics of their huge stone memorials. By the beginning of our own era, their settlements had advanced along the Rhine and Danube and reached far into the east of Europe.¹¹ Here, it is intimated, lie the first signs, the relics of the *Urvolk* (Germanic Ancestors), following their postdiluvian arrival on the shores of northern Europe at the start of their long journey east and south into their hinterland to 'become' the Germanic *Volk*.

The Atlantean myth¹² had been particularly influential on, and was further popularised by, nineteenth-century occultists such as Helena Blavatsky. Blavatsky was a mystic, writer, and the co-founder of the Theosophical Society in 1875. Her two-volume work, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), explored the origins of mankind; it linked to new scientific ideas such as evolution, but melded these ideas with mysticism. In particular, her occult exploration of 'Root races', the development of the Aryan race and the links to an Atlantean homeland are significant. Importantly for this discussion, these ideas filtered through to the *völkisch* pan-German mystics and occultists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who would create their own racial and spiritual philosophy, namely, Ariosophy (the wisdom of the Aryans). Ariosophists such as Guido von List and Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels adapted ideas from a broad range of influences, including Blavatsky's Theosophy, and notions of Aryan racial history as espoused by figures such as Arthur de Gobineau, who had pronounced on the theory of the Aryan master race in his essay *The Inequality of the Human Races* (1855). In the Ariosophic musings of Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, for example, it was postulated that certain 'pure' lines, '...were the closest living descendants of the former god-men'¹³ whose earliest recorded ancestors 'were the Atlanteans who had lived on a continent situated in the northern part of the Atlantic Ocean...' and

11 'Ihr ursprüngliches Siedlungsgebiet waren die offenen küstengebiete an Ostsee und Nordsee. Hier treffen wir noch heute als äusserlich sichtbare Zeugen ihrer gewaltigen steinernen Grabdenkmäler. Bis zum Beginn unserer Zeitrechnung waren ihre Siedlungen bis an Rhein und Donau vorgedrungen und reichten weit hinein in den europäischen Osten.' *Reichsamttsleitung des NS-Lehrerbundes, Deutsches Volk — Deutsches Heimat* (Bayreuth: Gauverlag Bayerische Ostmark G.m.b.h., 1935), p. 32.

12 The earliest account of the history of 'Atlantis' is Plato's late dialogue *Critias* (4th century BC) in which the philosopher discusses the location, history, and power of the Atlantean island.

13 Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism, Secret Aryan Cults and their influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), p. 97.

that, 'They were [...] descended from the original divine Theozoa with electromagnetic sensory organs and superhuman powers.'¹⁴ Effectively, as Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke has pointed out, the Social-Darwinian concept of a coming biological struggle for survival of the fittest was accepted and amalgamated with the notion of the inevitable dawn of a mystical and supreme root-race, the Aryan.¹⁵ Such occult, Ariosophist ideas bled into nationalist political thinking and were nurtured by the fratricidal apocalypse of the First World War.

In his book *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time*, Joscelyn Godwin suggested that:

After the First World War Germany was in need of myths that would excuse its defeat and give its people hope for the future. Ariosophy lay readily to hand with its enticing myth of a Nordic-Aryan-Atlantean origin for the German folk... The recent war had proved how the inferior races, with whom the Aryans unwisely interbred, had become their enemies both from within, by polluting their blood, and from without.¹⁶

As curious as this notion of an alternative and even mystical origin of the 'Aryan' (or, as it came to be alternatively named, the Nordic-Atlantean) may seem, it was variously endorsed by figures at the highest levels of the NSDAP. The *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler had himself stated 'That the Nordic race did not evolve, but came directly down from heaven to settle the Atlantic continent'.¹⁷

Himmler's interest in a Northern origin had been partly inspired by the research of the pre-historian Herman Wirth. Wirth was an eclectic

14 Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (1992), p. 209. Also, according to Goodrick-Clarke (p. 262), Lanz von Liebenfels' belief in the Atlantean origin had been inspired by the works of two specific post-WW1 books: Karl Georg Zschätzsch, *Atlantis, die Urheimat der Arier* (Atlantis the Original Homeland of the Aryans) (Berlin: Arier-Verlag, 1922) and Hermann Wieland, *Atlantis, Edda und Bibel* (Atlantis, Edda and Bible) (Weissenburg: Gross-deutscher Verlag, 1925).

15 Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (1992), p. 13.

16 Joscelyn Godwin, *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time, Prophecies, Traditions, and Occult Revelations* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2011), p. 124.

17 Himmler's belief in a celestial origin of the Aryan race had been confided to Zoologist and Ahnenerbe expedition leader Dr Ernst Schäfer, who revealed the details of this discussion with Himmler when Schäfer was interrogated after the war. 'The Activities of Dr. Ernst Schäfer, Tibet Explorer and Scientist with SS-sponsored Scientific Institutes', Headquarters United States Forces European Theater, Military Intelligence Service Centre, 12.02.1946, NARA, RG238, M1270/27 (quoted in Heather Pringle, *The Master Plan, Himmler's Scholars and the Holocaust* (New York: Hyperion, 2006), p. 150).

and eccentric Dutch scholar whose research had led him to conclude that the Nordic race had originated on a now lost northern Atlantic continent. His 1928 book *Der Aufstieg der Menschheit: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Religion, Symbolik und Schrift der atlantisch-nordischen Rasse*¹⁸ (Ascent of Mankind: Studies on the History of Religion, Symbolism and Texts of the Nordic-Atlantean Race) presented the notion that these so-called Nordic-Atlanteans had been the bearers of language, text, and civilisation to the world after a great cataclysm or climatic change had forced them to leave their northern homeland and migrate across the globe. When Wirth encountered the Oera Linda Book in 1922 he seemed to have discovered a treatise that confirmed his ideas. The Oera Linda Book was a supposedly ancient Frisian text whose assertions linked with Wirth's notion of the Nordic-Atlantean origins of the Germanic peoples. Cornelis Over de Linden had revealed the manuscript in 1867, when he presented it for translation and publication in Dutch. The book chronicled the history of a Nordic-Atlantean people whose nation, Atland or Aldland (read: Atlantis), had been destroyed and who had subsequently settled in Frisia. This Nordic *Urrasse* had comprehensively influenced the historical and cultural development of Europe and had even been the originators of the Phoenician and Greek alphabets.¹⁹

Wirth's theory of a Nordic-Atlantean race was regarded as controversial even in its day, but his outputs were often very positively received. In a 1929 book review of *Der Aufstieg der Menschheit* written for the journal the *American Anthropologist*, John M. Cooper explained:

The writer's general thesis is that pretty nearly everything worth while in the higher spiritual culture of the Occident harks back originally to blond, longheaded Nordics. Our historic Nordic race is the offspring of the *arktisch-nordische* or *vor-nordische Urrasse* that first appeared in the Tertiary on the then vast warm Arctic continent. These Proto-Nordics, with the coming of the glacial epoch, wandered perforce southward, into North America, "Atlantis," and Asia...

18 Herman Felix Wirth, *Der Aufstieg der Menschheit: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Religion, Symbolik und Schrift der atlantisch-nordischen Rasse* (Ascent of Mankind: Studies on the History of Religion, Symbolism and Texts of the Nordic-Atlantean Race) (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1928).

19 Many scholars rejected the book as a forgery as it challenged historical orthodoxy, but the debate still rages, and the modern proponents of its veracity continue to make the case for a thorough re-examination. For more information about the ongoing translation and research into this document see the blog: Saved From the Flood — Oera Linda Studies, <http://fryskednis.blogspot.com/>

... The whole work is planned to be issued in two parts... They may be cordially recommended to all the faithful who believe with Wirth that the Nordic race is 'die Trägerin der höchsten Geistesveranlagung und die Urheberin der höchsten Geisteskultur.'²⁰

A 1933 article in the Dutch newspaper the *Telegraaf* explained Wirth's Nordic-Atlantean hypothesis as an alternative (and potentially engaging) pagan belief system for the modern era. Under the banner 'Actual Primordial Religion of the Aryans', the subtitle dramatically states, 'Polar region regarded the birthplace of the noble Nordic race':

In Germany, a daily increasing movement of people can be observed, that turns away from Christianity and wants to return to the original Germanic and Aryan gods. This movement had been moderate, since many felt uncomfortable worshipping Wodan again. But now, Wirth has come with his "Hailbringer" and it is under this banner, that the anti-Christian Germans can somewhat decently unite if they want...²¹

Although he came to vociferously reject the full conclusions of Wirth's hypotheses — especially in light of Wirth's endorsement of the Oera Linda Book,²² and Wirth's ongoing patronage by Heinrich Himmler — Alfred Rosenberg, who considered himself to be the chief philosopher of the NSDAP, had also explicitly referred to an alternative origin of the Aryan race as Nordic-Atlanteans.²³

Rosenberg himself had, like the Ariosophic mystic Lanz von Liebenfels, been inspired by reading Karl Georg Zschätzsch's 1922 book *Atlantis, die Urheimat der Arier* (Atlantis, the Original Homeland of the Aryans). Consequently, in his book *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*

20 John M. Cooper, *American Anthropologist* 36:4 (October-December 1934), 600–01. 'the bearer of the highest spiritual predisposition and the creator of the highest spiritual culture.'

21 'Prof. Wirth's Heilbrenger,' *Telegraaf* (The Telegraph) 14 May 1933. Translation and source courtesy of Jan Ott, *Saved From the Flood — Oera Linda Studies*, 14 February 2016, <https://fryskednis.blogspot.com/2016/02/>

22 Wirth produced a beautifully bound German translation in 1933: *Die Ura Linda Chronik* (The Oera Linda Chronicle) (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang GMBH, 1933).

23 Despite being largely derided as unreadable, Rosenberg's 1930 book, *Der Mythos des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* (Myth of the Twentieth Century) had a significant reach, with the book selling well over a million copies and consequently having a broad influence: Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts. Eine Wertung der seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit* (The Myth of the 20th Century. A Maluation of the Mental-Spiritual Struggles of Our Time) München: Hoheneichen-Verlag, 1930).

(The Myth of the Twentieth Century) Rosenberg speculated that: ‘... the ancient legend of Atlantis... appear[s] in a new light. It seems not impossible that where the waves of the Atlantic Ocean now crash and erode giant icebergs, once a blossoming continent rose out of the water, on which a creative race raised a mighty, wide-ranging culture, and sent its children out into the world as seafarers and warriors’.²⁴

Although the entire Atlantean hypothesis was still largely dismissed within academia, and amongst Nordacists generally (and Rosenberg certainly did not continue to espouse this view publicly, at least), Himmler *did* continue to entertain the idea and to consider the Atlantean hypothesis as a more than plausible one. Indeed, Himmler maintained a correspondence with one of the few academics to defend the thesis, the archaeologist and professor of the University of Berlin, Albert Herrmann.²⁵ Furthermore, in a speech made to senior officials and SS officers on the occasion of Reinhard Heydrich’s funeral in 1942, the need for a mystical racial faith to replace Christianity was affirmed once more when Himmler referred directly to the ‘ancient one’ of the Oera Linda Book, Wralda:

Today at Heydrich’s funeral I intentionally expressed in my oration from my deepest conviction a belief in God, a belief in fate, in the ancient one as I called him — that is the old Germanic word: Wralda. We shall once again have to find a new scale of values for our people: the scale of the macrocosm and the microcosm, the starry sky above us and the world in us, the world that we see in the microscope. The essence of these megalomaniacs, these Christians who talk of men ruling this world, must stop and be put back in its proper proportion... By rooting our people in a deep ideological awareness of ancestors and grandchildren we must once more persuade them that they must have sons... That is our mission as a nation on this earth. For thousands of years it has been the mission of

24 Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (The Myth of the 20th Century) (1934 edition), p. 24.

25 Herrmann published a book to this effect, titled *Unsere Ahnen und Atlantis: Nordische Seeherrschaft von Skandinavien bis Nordafrika* (Our Ancestors and Atlantis: Nordic Maritime Domination from Scandinavia to North Africa) (Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1934). For more on the alternative origins of the Germans and the National Socialist academic position see Johann Chapoutot, *Greeks, Romans, Germans: How the Nazis Usurped Europe’s Classical Past* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017).

this blond race to rule the earth and again and again to bring it happiness and culture.²⁶

In 1934, on Himmler's invitation and in collaboration with *Reichsbauernführer* (Reich Peasant Leader) Richard Walther Darré, Wirth had been instrumental in the founding of the SS research institute known as the *Ahnenerbe*.²⁷ Himmler's *Ahnenerbe* was initially perceived as a research society of pre-history, and the intent was that it would pursue scholarly research into discovering the history, cultural foundations, and myths of the Germanic peoples. The *Ahnenerbe's* remit expanded rapidly and after 1937 (when Wirth was effectively frozen out)²⁸ became less of a *völkisch* research group and much more (ostensibly) rigorously academic under the guiding hand of Walther Wüst.²⁹ However, with Himmler's interests in esoterica and the occult seemingly unquenchable,³⁰ and as he was an attentive and micromanaging chief, areas most academics considered pseudo-science continued to play a part in the broader programme of Himmler's institute. Some areas that were examined included: 'radiesthesia ('pendulum dowsing'), cosmobiology, and biodynamic

26 Heinrich Himmler, 'Gedenkrede für Reinhard Heydrich,' English translation in Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds, *Nazism, 1919–1945, Vol. 2, State, Economy and Society 1933–1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), p. 304. Original German: 'Rede vor den Oberabschnittsführern und Hauptamtschefs im Haus der Flieger in Berlin am 9. 6. 1942 (Gedenkrede für Reinhard Heydrich) (Speech to the upper section leaders and chief officers in the House of Airmen in Berlin on June 9, 1942, memorial speech for Reinhard Heydrich),' U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD, T-175, Roll 90, Frames 2664–2685; reproduced in Bradley F. Smith and Agnes F. Peterson, eds, *Heinrich Himmler: Geheimreden 1933 bis 1945 und andere Ansprachen* (Heinrich Himmler: Secret speeches 1933 to 1945 and other speeches) (Frankfurt am Main: Propyläen, 1974), pp. 159–61.

27 Its full title eventually became the *Forschungs und Lehrgemeinschaft des Ahnenerbe* (the Research and Teaching Community of the Ancestral Heritage).

28 By 1937 the controversial and financially extravagant Wirth had effectively been 'retired' as it was felt that the *Ahnenerbe* needed to become (ostensibly at least) more academically grounded and 'scientific'.

29 As well as exploring pre-history and archaeology, other areas of research included (but were not limited to) anthropology, meteorology, philology, nuclear science, musicology, and folklore.

30 For a scholarly examination of Himmler and his interest in the occult see, Stephen Flowers and Michael Moynihan, *The Secret King: The Myth and Reality of Nazi Occultism* (Los Angeles & Waterbury Center, VT: Feral House & Dominion Press, 2007).

agriculture.³¹ These were but a few of the areas of esoteric sciences often keenly endorsed and explored. Such interests extended to photographic propaganda, and fragmentary evidence exists that the *Ahmenerbe* supported (both ideologically and financially) the work of photographers engaged with these studies of a mythic Ethnos. An implicit framing of the 'Germanic' peasant in 'supernatural' terms, and often with links to an occultic Nordic-Atlantean hypothesis, demonstrably continued.

Urbild des Gottmenschen (Archetype of the God-Man)

The portrait of a young farmer by Erich Retzlaff, was reproduced in a 1935 issue of the *NS-Frauen-Warte* to accompany an article entitled 'Der blonde Junge' (The Blond Youth) by Erika Meyer. The closely cropped three-quarter profile of the blond youth accentuates a face that is both solemn and stoically resilient, with its intense out-of-the-frame stare. That intensity is intended to point to a deep passion and strength of belief. And Retzlaff's image of youth accords with Meyer's textual narrative accompanying the image: 'Yes, my *Heimat*, my soil, my work! The blond boy feels it every day, that's why his forehead is so solemnly serious. That's why he speaks so little, that's why his eyes have the brightness of joy and happiness: my *Heimat* — my work.'³²

As Figure 5.2 suggests, central to the photographic interpretation of a 'mysticism' in the photography of Ethnos was the figure of the farmer, the *Bauer*. In *völkisch* terms, the people of the countryside were regarded as exemplars of the nation as a whole, untainted by that perception of a cosmopolitan degeneracy and alienation postulated as being inherent to life in the city. This notion was central too to National Socialism, reviving as it did an old tradition of representations of the peasant where the peasant motif was presented as an anchor to blood-and-soil conceptions.³³ In contrast to a metropolitan ethnic diversity and

31 For more on the seeming paradox between the National Socialist state's efforts to determine what was (useful) 'scientific occultism' and what was 'occult charlatanry' (and therefore repressed), and the strange mélange explored by Himmeler's *Ahmenerbe*, see Eric Kurlander, 'The Nazi Magicians' Controversy: Enlightenment, "Border Science," and Occultism in the Third Reich,' *Central European History* 48:4 (December, 2015).

32 Erika Meyer, 'Der blonde Junge,' (The Blond Youth) *NS-Frauen-Warte* 4 (1935–1936), 106 (author's translation).

33 For more on the peasant motif in German art and photography see Christian Weikop, 'August Sander's *Der Bauer* and the Pervasiveness of the Peasant Tradition',

und Tanz, ernste Arbeit, verantwortungsvolle Pflichterfüllung schmieden sie zusammen. Weltanschauliche politische Schulung rühten sie alle einheitlich aus.

So ist eine häusliche Wechselbeziehung da. Bei einer Schulung des Reichsnährstandes sind immer die Führer und Führerinnen von HJ. und BDM-Einheiten anwesend und sprechen dort zu den Mädels. Umgekehrt sprechen Vertreter des Reichsnährstandes ständig vor HJ. und BDM. Das Leben der Dorfjugend ist schon jetzt wieder von neuem Geist erfüllt. Dorfgemeinschaftsabende führen alle Dorfbewohner aller NS-Formationen zu wirtschaftlicher Dorfgemeinschaft zusammen, ohne Unterscheid des Standes. In

ihrer Formation zu nationalsozialistischem Denken und Handeln erzogen, läßt das Dorf mit seinen Sitten und Bräuchen, seinen Sitten und Feiern, das letzte Band um sie.

Die Reichsnährstandsausstellung in Hamburg hat in der Abteilung „Jugend am Pflug“ deutlich gezeigt, welche Marschridung wir eingeschlagen haben, welches unser Ziel ist und wie weit wir bereits vorgebrungen sind. Zum Landjugend gehört die Uniform, zum Landmadel neben das bäuerliche Kleid die Kluff. Die Spinnlube der Landjugend hat diese Verbindung gezeigt, da die Mädels sich neben ihren anderen Säden auch BDM-Rod und -Bluse weben.

Der blonde Junge

Von Erika Meyer

Auf einlamer Höhe steht das kleine Haus mit dem tiefen, hängenden Strohdach, den blinde Senfertscheiben. Eine Dümpe steht alt und verrostet davor. Ein paar hohe Pappeln ragen auf einem Hügel, verdecken das Haus beinahe. Wie verschlafen ist es.

Der aber am Morgen vorbestimmt an dem einlamer Haus, der sieht den blonden Jungen im kleinen Hof. Ein paar Hühner laufen dort umher, und ein Hund bellt. Der blonde Junge treut den Hühnern ihr Korn, er trägt an einem Wallesträger über der Schulter zwei Eimer von der alten Dümpe, er geht in den niedrigen Stall und freisetzt die Pferde.

Der blonde Junge ist dümal und hochgewachsen, er hat harte Knochen und ein braunes Gesicht. Seine Augen haben den Ausdruck des Glüdes, der Freude. Sie schauen in vollem Bewußtsein der Schwere des Lebens und haben doch noch den reinen Glanz eines Kindes. Sein dicker blonder Schopf fällt ihm ein wenig in die Stirn, die so leilam ernst und feierlich ist.

Der blonde Junge spricht wenig. Es sind noch zwei Knechte auf dem Hof, und ein hause ist eine alte Frau, die mit schweren franten Füßen im Stuhl am Fenster sitzt, am Herd in der niedrigen rauchigen Küche steht ein großes Mädchen und lummt.

Die Augen des blonden Jungen schauen überall hin, seine Hände fallen nach allem, sein Schritt hallt durch das Haus, über den Hof, im Garten, sein Weg führt aufs Feld.

Seine Beine, die noch nach Jungensart bloß in Sandalen

reden — er ist ja erst fünfzehn Jahre — haben noch nicht den weitauholenden Schritt eines Mannes, und seine Schultern sind noch nicht so breit wie die der Bauern unten im Dorf. Sie kennen ihn alle im Dorf, und sie nennen ihn „den blonden Jungen“. Es gibt wohl viele blonde Kinder im Dorf und blonde Männer und Frauen, aber zu keinem scheint das Blond lo zugehörig, bei keinem scheint es lo eigenstes Wesen geworden zu sein wie bei ihm: dem blonden Jungen.

Sie kennen ihn alle, wie er er seinen Selbern vorbeistrett, sie kennen ihn alle, wie er seinen Schritt unregelmäßig, halb jugendhaften, halb männlichen Schritt. Er geht an seinen Aedern entlang, jeden Tag, und schaut mit heiligem Ernst darauf nieder. Jeden Tag läßt er sich ein paar Augenbude Zeit für seinen Ader, um auf ihm niederzuschauen, um ihm zuzumiden, um ihm zu lauschen. Denn der Boden spricht, spricht etwas, was man in Worte nicht zu fassen vermag, und was der blonde Junge sich jeden Tag von neuem anhört.

Den Bauern ist es, als wiesse er den Boden, als seien es seine Augen, die ihm Kraft erteilen. Sie lieben es sonst nicht, wenn Kinder die Arbeit eines Bauern tun, sie wollen die Kinder anweisen, sie lehren. Bei dem blonden Jungen von dem einlamer Haus ist es etwas anderes.

Sie haben viel zu tun, die Bauern, und feiner will dem andern nachsehen in der Bestellung seiner Selber. So kommen sie nicht oft in das kleine Haus oben am Hügel. Aber sie wissen, „oben geht es schon recht“.

Jeden Abend freisetzt die alte frante Frau den Kopf des Jungen: „Du halt dein Tagewert wieder getan!“ Dann fährt er freudig die harten Hände, die einst zufallen konnten wie die seinen, und sagt: „Mein Tagewert war wieder schön!“

Sein Tagewert ist hart, lo hart, daß seine Schultern wohl bald breit sein werden, lo hart, daß seine Schritte bald weit ausbolen müssen, lo hart, daß seine Hände Männerhände werden, tauch und voll Schwiefen.

Und doch ist sein Tagewert beinahe immer wie eine Seier. Sein Haus hat zwar nur ein armes Strohdach und kleine Senfertscheiben, die Küche ist niedrig und tauchig, und das Wasser muß mühsam von der Dümpe geholt werden. Aber hohe Pappeln schirmen das Haus, sie feiern mit ihm. Es sind nicht viele Tiere da: zwei Pferde, zwei Kühe, ein paar Hühner, ein paar Schweine. Sie machen viele Arbeit, denn es sind nur wenige Menschen dort oben — aber sie sind wie gute Freunde, die mitwirken, mitfeiern am Tagewert. Besonders die Pferde. Bis zu den Aedern ist ein weiter Weg, aber er führt durch liebliches Gebüsch, durch Blumenwiesen, auf denen Kühe weiden.

Und aus den Aedern spricht eine heilige Stimme! Eine Stimme, die wohl nicht jeder hören kann, die aber dem blonden Jungen die Seier gibt, die Andacht zu seinem Tagewert: Heimat, Boden, Arbeit, spricht diese Stimme. Ja, meine Heimat, mein Boden, meine Arbeit! Der blonde Junge fühlt es täglich, darum ist seine Stirn lo feierlich und ernst. Darum spricht er lo wenig, darum haben seine Augen den Glanz von Freude und Glüd: meine Heimat — meine Arbeit.

Bauer aus der Marsch

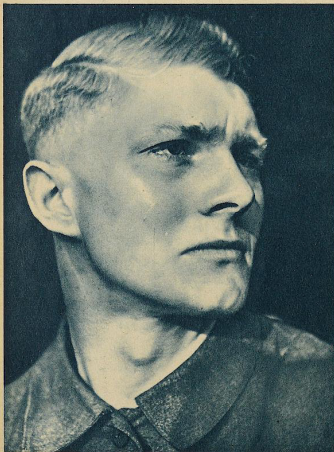


Bild: Retzlaff, Dunselborf

Fig. 5.2 Erich Retzlaff, *Bauer aus der Marsch* (A Farmer from the Fens) reproduced in *NS-Frauen-Warte* 4 (1935–1936), 106. Public domain.

the supposed cultural corruption of the cities, the simple country folk, surviving with their traditions into the twentieth century, were presented as important representatives of a long tradition that stretched back into the mists of time and as such were the guardians of the purest spirit and blood of the race, with (notionally at least) a photographically framed aspect of holiness. In this photograph by Hans Saebens, for example, the young North Frisian girls from Föhr are pictured in their traditional communion costumes (see Fig. 5.3).

Saebens has used a soft, flattering filter to create a diffused glow of light around the two subjects. The girls are both in profile with their mouths slightly open as if they have been captured in song or in prayer. The whole is framed like a Wagnerian, operatic motif of a hallowed interaction between ritual, history and tradition. In this framing of a the 'supernatural imaginary,' it is irrelevant that the service is a Christian one; rather, the selection and framing suggests that these girls are seen as emanations of light, representatives of an ancient and mystical bloodline that bears the spark of both the divine and the eternal.

As an example of this characterisation, the National Socialist Indo-Europeanist Walther Wüst elucidated in 1936:

We are, as we can assert with pride based on the most recent, careful, racial research, 'the oldest people on the earth.' Our forefathers were farmers, established farmers in the noblest meaning of the word, who, even four thousand years prior to recorded history, had known how to plow and had managed highly developed animal husbandry and agriculture. Their lives took fullest expression in the cleared arable landscape surrounded by forests. That was their world, not the nerve-splitting, immoral city.³⁴

Erich Retzlaff's first series of physiognomic portraits of rural Germans was published in three volumes, beginning in 1930 with his *Das Antlitz des Alters* (The Face of Age), followed by the two-volume *Deutsche*

Tate Papers 19 (Spring 2013), <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/19/august-sanders-der-bauer-and-the-pervasiveness-of-the-peasant-tradition>

34 This was a speech Wüst gave to the opening of *Pflegstätte für Germanenkunde* (Promotional Centre for German Studies) in 1936, quoted in Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 191.



Fig. 5.3 Hans Saebens, *Konfirmandinnen aus Föhr* (Confirmants from Föhr), vintage silver gelatin print, c.1936. Courtesy of Aberystwyth University, School of Art Museum and Galleries.

Menschen (German People) in 1931.³⁵ As ‘examples’ they were widely reproduced — for example, in the August 1932 picture-magazine *Atlantis*, these images were reproduced in full-page format and bore the caption: ‘from different regions of Germany, they show the German face still undistorted by urban civilization’.

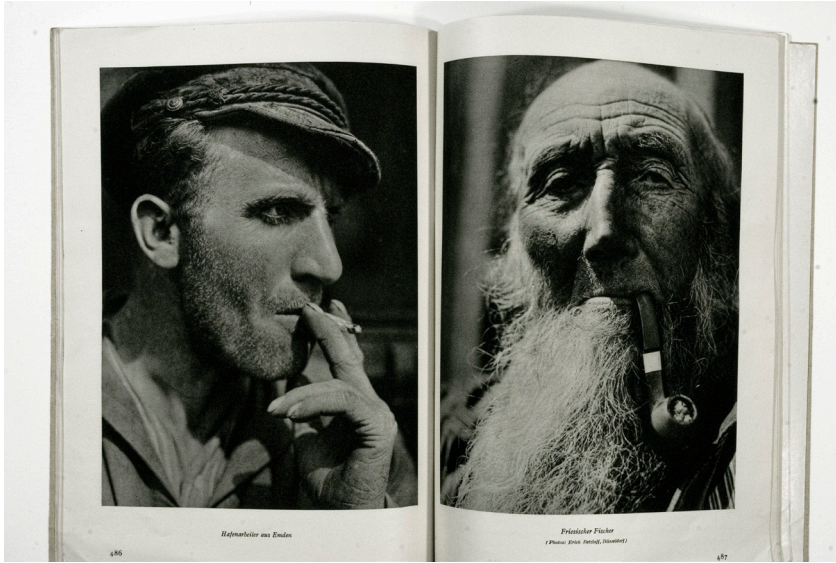


Fig. 5.4 Erich Retzlaff, *Hafenarbeiter aus Emden & Friesischer Fischer* (Harbour Worker from Emden & Frisian Fishermen) reproduced in ‘*Atlantis*, Heft 8, August 1932, pp. 486–87. Public domain.

In the post-1933 era, these collections of the physiognomic peasant type proliferated. Retzlaff, Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, and others produced further volumes of racial-physiognomic studies throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Received favourably by the National Socialists, these aestheticised photographic portfolios framed the subjects in these books in a different manner to that of the ‘scientific’ quantitative route of racial photography so typical of anthropological studies. According to the Dutch scholar Remco Ensel, when discussing correlating Dutch

35 Respectively: Erich Retzlaff and Jakob Kneip, *Das Antlitz des Alters* (The Face of Age) (Düsseldorf: Pädagogischer Verlag g.m.b.h., 1930); Erich Retzlaff, *Die von der Scholle* (Those of the Earth) (Göttingen: Verlag der Deuerlichschen Buchhandlung o.J., 1931), and Erich Retzlaff, *Menschen am Werk* (People and Work) (Göttingen: Verlag der Deuerlichschen Buchhandlung o.J., 1931).

Heimat photographs from the same period, this 'folksy' photography differed from anthropological racial photography in that it 'specialized in a semiotic interpretation of signs. A people's character had to be read, not measured or calculated'.³⁶ This was a science of looking and evaluating transmuted into art through the photographer's lens, which was ultimately intended to underline a readable racial characteristic that was also representative of the *Volksggeist* or spirit of the nation.

An example of Himmler's ideological and political involvement in the work of these photographers of Ethnos is evident from the fact that Erich Retzlaff had been offered support by Himmler's *Ahnenerbe*. The support followed the development of a 1942 collaborative project proposed by Retzlaff and the Dutch photographer Willem F. van Heemskerck Düker³⁷ with the Metzner Verlag.³⁸ The proposal outlined a project centred on picturing the inhabitants of the 'Germanic Netherlands'. Not only was strengthening links with other 'Germanic' nations considered important politically, especially if they were now an occupied territory, but there was also a view that, ideologically, the Nordic characteristics of the lower German region, and Scandinavia in particular, were indicative of a purer racial quality that was inherited from that mystical, progenitor race of beings who had, in Himmler's view, come 'down from heaven'.

The 1942 meetings between Retzlaff and van Heemskerck Düker in Berlin were outlined in a report by Machteld Nachenius, van Heemskerck Düker's secretary-assistant.³⁹ Although the report is brief, it contains

36 Remco Ensel, 'Photography, Race and Nationalism in the Netherlands', in Paul Puschmann and Tim Riswick, eds, *Building Bridges. Scholars, History and Historical Demography. A Festschrift in Honor of Professor Theo Engelen* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2018), p. 254.

37 Van Heemskerck Düker worked for the Dutch Volksche Werkgemeenschap (People's Working Community), a cultural department of the SS and the Dutch arm of the *Ahnenerbe*.

38 Rolf Sachsse has suggested that it is likely that Retzlaff benefited from his relationship with his lover Regina Dorsch (Verlag Otto Beyer) who made use of her influence in publishing to secure valuable contracts for Retzlaff with the Metzner Verlag. Certainly, Retzlaff was involved with at least three book projects with the Metzner Verlag between 1943 and 1944 (Rolf Sachsse, personal communication, August 2014).

39 Machteld Nachenius was a photographer herself and her work had been included in Hamer publications such as *Friesland-Friezenland* (Frisia-Frisia) (Willem Frederik van Heemskerck Düker and Sytse Jan van der Molen, *Friesland-Friezenland* (Frisia-Frisia) (Den Haag: Hamer, 1942)). As Machteld noted, 'The *Ahnenerbe* offers 100 Isopan F, colour film and a Leica model IIIa.' These notes (translated from the Dutch) are from a 1942 report by Machteld Nachenius the secretary of van

clues as to the supposed significance of the inhabitants of the north-western 'Germanic' shoreline, as well as confirming further *Ahnenerbe* involvement with the consultation of the pre-historian, eminent archaeologist and *Ahnenerbe* associate Professor Wilhelm Unverzagt.⁴⁰

The patchy notes further outline the meetings with the publishers and Unverzagt, and the intentions of the project, especially with regards to the regions to be studied and the emphasis to be placed on those photographed:

Friday 10th April: We agreed in principle to have VHD write the text and to collaborate on the pictures. R. mentioned several locations in Sl. [Schleswig] Holstein and in Northern Friesland that were worth a visit...

Saturday 11th April: Meeting with Prof. Dr. Unverzagt, on which occasion more locations for Sl Holstein were discussed.

Van Heemskerck Düker was already familiar with Retzlaff's work before being invited to work with Retzlaff on this *Ahnenerbe*-supported project. The two photographers had already both featured in a text written and edited by Van Heemskerck Düker himself. That book was titled *Friesland-Friezenland* (Frisia-Frisia) and was published in 1942, so their working acquaintance was still fresh when the new project was suggested that same year. As well as the work of Erich Retzlaff, *Friesland-Friezenland* featured the work of the Germans Hans Retzlaff and Hans Saebens, as well as a range of Dutch photographers of Ethnos such as Nico de Haas and van Heemskerck Düker himself.⁴¹ Van Heemskerck Düker was, by

Heemskerck Düker, they were made on their journey to Berlin (7–12 April 1942) and are provided here courtesy of Dr Remco Ensel (personal communication, 12 August 2013).

40 Dr Wilhelm Unverzagt was a member of the NSDAP and an *Ahnenerbe* researcher. He was responsible for a number of archaeological digs in the Balkans under the supervision of the *Ahnenerbe* managing director Wolfram Sievers and *Ahnenerbe* archaeologist Herbert Jankuhn, in a project Himmler termed *Totalerforschung* (complete research). Retzlaff was demonstrably active in the Balkans at the time Unverzagt and Jankuhn were there, and Retzlaff certainly made physiognomic studies of Caucasus peoples, some of which I have recently viewed and the negatives of which I was able to add to the archive of Aberystwyth University's School of Art Gallery and Museum in 2015. I have yet to establish whether or not Retzlaff was directly involved in the *Ahnenerbe* project in the Caucasus. However, given the difficulty of civilians travelling during the war, and with his confirmed previous *Ahnenerbe* sponsorship, it does seem exceedingly likely.

41 Like van Heemskerck Düker, de Haas was a member of the SS and part of the Dutch *Volksche Werkgemeenschap* (People's Working Community). Notably, de Haas was

1942, also an *SS-Onderstormleider* (SS — Junior Assault Unit Leader) in the Dutch SS and, as part of the 'Feldmeijer group',⁴² he was involved in publications and promotional materials designed to reinforce the notion of a Greater Germany and a shared destiny. With its exploration of Dutch and German Friesland, *Friesland-Friezenland* photographically 'demonstrated' the racial, cultural, and chimerical links between the two nations and thus underlined the notion that the 'Germanic' was a concept that superseded modern political boundaries and, moreover, linked the two peoples to a 'superior' historical and mythic past. These earlier publications and projects were *Ahnenerbe*-funded via the Dutch National Socialist publisher the *Hamer Uitgeverij*.⁴³



Fig. 5.5 *Van eenen bloede: jongens uit Oost- en Westfriesland* (Of One Blood: Youths from East and West Friesland) double page spread in W. F. van Heemskerck Düker, *Friesland-Friezenland* (Frisia-Frisia) (Den Haag: Hamer, 1942), pp. 156–57. Public domain.

one of only a very few Dutch nationals who personally received the highly prized SS honour ring from *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler.

42 Henk Feldmeijer was a Dutch National Socialist and leading member of the *Volksche Werkgemeenschap* 'People's Working Community'.

43 The *Stichting Uitgeverij Hamer* (Hamer Publishing Foundation) was a proponent of the Greater German Reich and the publishing house was set up with a contributory donation by Himmler himself.

The references to an occulted Nordic-Atlantean origin are even more marked in these Dutch *Hamer* publications with which van Heemskerck Düker was involved, both as an editor and as a photographer. The layout and content of the text further reinforces this concept. For example, despite having lost his position of honorary president in the *Ahnenerbe* by 1939, the Dutch Herman Wirth was still being lauded in these Dutch National Socialist photographic publications and his theories of the origins of the 'Aryan' in a northern Atlantis presented as axiomatic. In one such photographically illustrated text, *Zinnebeelden in Nederland* (Symbols in the Netherlands) (1940), it is stated:

Professor Herman Wirth [...] has emphatically and repeatedly pointed out, that we are wrong to assume that our race, with which the runes are so closely connected, is of Eastern origin. In his opinion, a Northern cultural origin is most probable and this would additionally explain the specific use of the solar cycle in the runes.⁴⁴

These photographs were signs of a racial consubstantiality that could be identified with, to create a national unity where, as Kurlander observed, 'the individual considers himself part of an overreaching, godly essence that is seeking to unfold itself'.⁴⁵

The people whom these photographers selected to be fixed in place in picture-books, exhibitions, and illustrated magazines exemplified the Norwegian author Knut Hamsun's peasant type, that is, someone who was 'A tiller of the ground, body and soul; a worker on the land without respite. A ghost risen out of the past to point to the future, a man from the earliest days of cultivation, a settler in the wilds, nine-hundred years old, and, withal, a man of the day.'⁴⁶ The figure of the autochthonous peasant, framed as an archetype, is not presented as an individual but rather as a representation of something primordial from the National Myth. The people are offered to the viewer without being named, rather, as in the physiognomic paradigm of the era, they are titled with their occupation and location. These photo-stories, these series of images collected together in the new medium of the photo-book, were designed

44 W. F. van Heemskerck Düker and H. J. van Houten, *Zinnebeelden in Nederland* (Symbols of the Netherlands) (Den Haag: Hamer, 1940), p. 14.

45 Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters* (2017), p. 172.

46 Knut Hamsun, *Growth of the Soil* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1917), Book 2, chapter 12, p. 252.

to be encountered, identified with and *read*; presenting an idealised entry point to this National Myth.

For example, *SS-Obersturmbannführer* (SS-Senior Assault Unit Leader) Dr Franz Riedweg wrote in the concluding note to Lendvai-Dircksen's book *Flandern* (1942):

We turn to man, not, as in the past, as a physiological organism, as an intellectual carrier or as a creature burdened with guilt, but to man as a creature related to God and the founder of eternal values. His face is for us the mirror of his being. From the gaze, from the smile, from the play of his movements comes the divinity of thought and the power of mind. From the clarity of the forehead shines the light of reason.

In this series we look at the face of the people, that is, we turn to those people in whom the ancient currents of race, blood and national traditions are unbroken and visibly alive.⁴⁷

These images of Ethnos produced in the National Socialist state were a visual representation of a time when, according to the eminent psychologist Carl Jung, the spirit of Wotan was awakening: 'a god has taken possession of the Germans and their house is filled with a "mighty rushing wind."' ⁴⁸ When navigating this contentious web of identity, history, and belonging, Jung, a close contemporary of the photographers who made this work, elucidated on the milieu and spirit of Germany in the 1930s that relates to this manifestation of a mythic photography of Ethnos. According to Jung, archetypal images (or primordial images) occur as '...universal patterns or motifs which come from the collective unconscious... the basic content of religions, mythologies, legends and fairy tales.'⁴⁹ Jung's exposition on the role of the archetype is relevant to this photography, in which the figures that were photographed as those most 'ordinary folk' are transformed and representative of archetypal imprints, which represented the reawakening of the German to a lineal thread that extended back into the dim past. Although illustrative of a

47 Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das Germanische Volksgesicht, Flandern* (The German Face, Flanders) (Bayreuth: Gauverlag Bayreuth, 1942).

48 Carl Gustav Jung, 'Essay on Wotan' [First published as 'Wotan'], *Neue Schweizer Rundschau* (New Swiss Review), n.s. III (March 1936), 657–69. English translation by Barbara Hannah in *Essays on Contemporary Events* (London: Kegan Paul, 1947), pp. 1–16, <http://www.philosopher.eu/others-writings/essay-on-wotan-w-nietzsche-c-g-jung/>

49 Quoted in James A. Hall, *Jungian Dream Interpretation: A Handbook of Theory and Practice* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1983), p. 120.

variety of ages, occupations, and regions, these images often depicted a range of what are clearly intended to be representations of archetypal figures. There is the *Volk* mother, the traditional representation of the childbearing, working woman who is perhaps one of the most powerful of these archetypes and which was a representation of the literal future of the nation.



Fig. 5.6 Hans Saebens, *Schaumburg Lippe Bückerbergerinnen* (Bückerburg Woman from Schaumburg Lippe) vintage silver gelatin print, c.1936. Courtesy of Aberystwyth University, School of Art Museum and Galleries.



Fig. 5.7 Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Ostpreußische Frauen* (East-Prussian Women) reproduced in 'NS-Frauen-Warte', Heft 1, 1 Juli, 1939, pp. 14–15. Public domain.

Along with this pagan, fertile representation of the Madonna and child, females of different ages are also widely represented. Figure 5.7, for example, is a double page spread from a 1939 edition of the journal *NS-Frauen-Warte* featuring the work of the photographer Erna Lendvai-Dircksen. It contains several images of elderly women (the crone archetype) and a young girl (the maiden) to illustrate the point. As was often the case, significant quotations were placed alongside the images (in this case a traditional lullaby) all in a Fraktur script. Thus, the modernity of this glossy, photographically illustrated magazine is fused with the traditions of the past, just as the 'modern' photographs represent 'traditional' female roles. In the accompanying text, Lendvai-Dircksen suggests that the faces of these women might be read as indicative of humour, struggle, and hardship and that these faces are 'a poem of the nature of the tribe'.⁵⁰ So past, present, and future are joined together in a linked chain of a traditional femininity.

50 Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Ostpreußische Frauen* (East-Prussian Women), *NS-Frauen-Warte*, 1 (July 1939), 14–15.

Visual representations of the male were treated similarly and included the hero, the youth, and the wise old man. As in the *NS-Frauen-Warte* pages, the images and text in an example from the journal *Volk und Rasse* (see Fig. 5.8) represent the 'warrior', two images of Waffen-SS soldiers 'in the field'.

Like the *NS-Frauen-Warte* examples, the journal *Volk und Rasse* provided archaism — with its *fraktur* text — accentuated alongside the modernity of its photographic reproductions and magazine format. Similarly, these soldiers are presented as archetypal warriors or knights; one holds the harness of a horse and no modern weaponry is evident. The men are reproduced in dramatic profile, their physiognomic traits evident, situated on the page above two happy children who play in glowing sunshine. The legend reads: 'The goal of all struggle is to secure a living space for our children'.⁵¹

But these journals would go even further in attempting to anchor the sense of a mythic tribal consciousness. In a 1939 *NS-Frauen-Warte* article (see Fig. 5.9), the historical legacy of the Germanic peoples is once more extolled in a modern context. Entitled *Vorgeschichte und Gegenwart* or 'pre-history and the present', the article is filled with quotes from the Edda and illustrated with photographs of modern Germans dressed in the 'attire' of the bronze-age German.

The text describes the historic and ongoing legacy of the Nordic race and how National Socialism had reawakened their power to grasp a future that awaited them, whilst reminding the *Volk* of their ancestral legacy.⁵² These modern Germans were posed in historic costumes as having transcended time and as representative of perfect modern replicas of an ancient current — as their racial heritage was 'untainted'. So, modernity and the new political consensus were melded perfectly and linked to an ongoing tradition of community, history, and myth.

These photographic motifs, played out as they were in these popular and easily received formats such as magazines, were intended to elicit a recognition of a flowing collective unconscious that, once realised, would stream through and unite the *Volk* in a primeval joining and

51 Otto Kolar, *Waffen-SS im feld* (Waffen-SS in the Field), *Volk und Rasse*, 2 (February 1942), unpaginated frontispiece.

52 Joachim Benecke, 'Vorgeschichte und Gegenwart' (Pre-history and the Present), *NS-Frauen-Warte* 15 (January 1939), pp. 456–59.



Fig. 5.8 Otto Kolar, *Waffen-SS im Felde* (Waffen-SS in the Field) reproduced in *Volk und Rasse*, Heft 2 February 1942, frontispiece. Public domain.

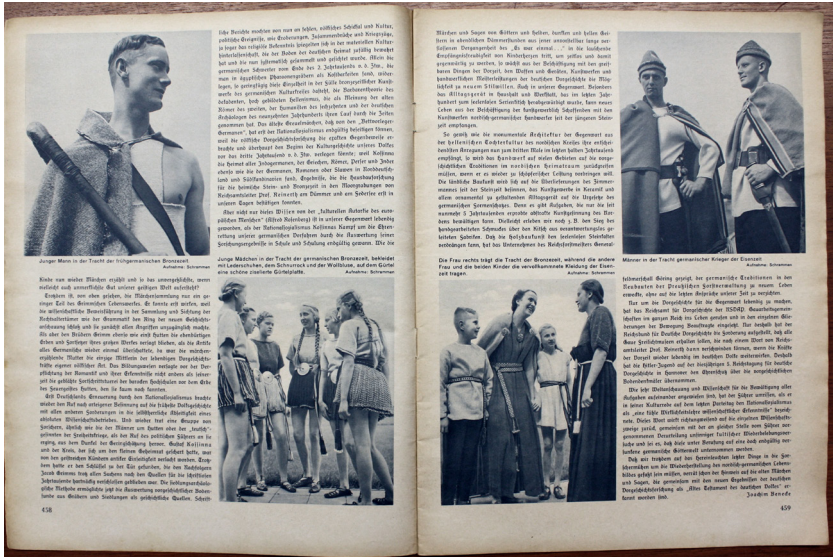


Fig. 5.9 Joachim Benecke, *Vorgeschichte und Gegenwart* (Pre-History and the Present), 'NS-Frauen-Warte', Heft 15 January 1939, pp. 458–59. Public domain.

elicit a powerful national awakening. National Socialist ideologues and propagandists, like their predecessors in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century *völkisch* mise-en-scène, recognised the unifying power of myth as well as the powerful influence of occult thinking on contemporary Germans, and thus promoted (and exploited) it as part of their overarching cultural programme.

The photographic portfolios of the likes of Erna Lendvai-Dirksen, Erich Retzlaff, and others, present motifs infused with a mytho-spiritual edge, an echo of Jung's suggestion of Wotan's awakening.⁵³ Unlike the 'unfixed physiognomy of the sitters' in Helmar Lerski's Weimar-era *Köpfe des Alltags* (Everyday Heads), these collections provide a mythification that will 'shape the sitters as heroic icons of an imagined German

53 In a later (post-war) correspondence, Jung further commented on the desirability of the racial archetype when discussing the problems facing Western man in the globalist era. Jung wrote, 'He can only discover himself when he is deeply and unconditionally related to some, and generally related to a great many, individuals with whom he has a chance to compare, and from whom he is able to discriminate himself.' C. G. Jung to Miguel Serrano, Zurich, 14 September 1960; in M. Serrano, *Jung & Hesse: A Record of Two Friendships* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 84.

identity.⁵⁴ Such photographic constructs, therefore, also provided a marker of exclusion for those who fell outside of this narrative.

Conclusion

In 1974, Susan Sontag wrote a critique of Leni Riefenstahl's 1973 photographic book *The Last of the Nuba* (German title *Die Nuba*). Sontag's essay 'Fascinating Fascism' posited Riefenstahl's post-war volume as representative of, as she termed it, a 'Fascist aesthetic'. According to Sontag, Riefenstahl 'interprets the Nuba as a mystical people with an extraordinarily developed artistic sense... [overcoming] the challenge and ordeal of the elemental, the primitive... epics of achieved community, in which triumph over everyday reality is achieved by ecstatic self-control and submission.'⁵⁵ However, it is certainly this element of the mystical, the notion of the 'uncorrupted' (by modernity), something that links tradition and the present, a striving for perfection and a danger of immersion in a globalizing world that links Riefenstahl's post-war project with her innovative (and now notorious) film work during National Socialism, as well as being characteristic of the work of her pre-1945 German contemporaries who were photographing the autochthonous peasant. Indeed, such notions also continue to be expounded by those considered to be of the European New Right and of the neo-folk and racial pagan scene today. As folklorist Carolyn Emerick recently suggested, 'We can see that mythos and ethnos had always gone hand in hand as part of one holistic *whole* state of being before universalist ideology began working to sever the "ethnikos" from their folk identity.'⁵⁶

Modern forms of communication, such as photography, were masterfully manipulated to promote the image and ideas of National Socialism through visual propaganda, such as the photography under

54 Pepper Stetler, *Stop Reading! Look! Modern Vision and the Weimar Photographic Book* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), p. 165.

55 Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Straus & Giroux, 1980), pp. 86–87. Sontag's essay goes on to 'position' Riefenstahl's work as an extension of the work that Riefenstahl created during the Third Reich. Riefenstahl's post-war re-imagining of her creative career as being that of an artist whose work was 'used' by the state and over which she had no control is critiqued by Sontag.

56 Carolyn Emerick, 'Cultural Mythos & the Return of the Ethnikos,' *Arktos Journal* (posted online 29 October 2018), <https://arktos.com/2018/10/29/cultural>

discussion here. Photography was just one element in that larger picture, but it was a significant one. Many photographers were employed in building up a picture of an energetic and healthy nation steeped in tradition and this mystical Ethnos, which stood outside of 'scientific' typological studies. These photographers set about to manifest visually a spirit of optimism and change running through their country, a visual story of a revolution in living and being, but contextualised in relation to tradition, to a half-glimpsed (but ever present) occultic myth and to the '*Heimat*'. It was in sharp contrast to the representative and utilitarian lot of the 'revealed' individual framed in much of the physiognomic work of the Weimar era. Lerski's *Köpfe des Alltags* had exposed (according to Pepper Stetler),

...the melancholic fate of the individual under this system of modern vision. Ultimately, it articulates the unsettling death of the individual in the face of Weimar's desperate craze for visual legibility and a fixed system of identity. Rather than providing such a system, the ephemeral faces of *Köpfe des Alltags* uncannily remind us of what was lost in the heady alliance of modernity and physiognomy during the Weimar Republic.⁵⁷

The dramatic pictorial constructions of physiognomic Ethnos that were presented in the Third Reich era attempted to showcase this supposed newfound 'health and vitality' and reverse the 'unsettling death' by visually formalising a link between *Volk* and myth, a metaphysical, occultic convergence through photography. The physically strong peasants labouring on the land, the close observation of the face and body, the traditional costume or activity, all staged a picture of a healthy, vibrant culture, of a seemingly unified national body. Photography became a decisive part of this narrative of a nation renewed. The photographers of Ethnos who were making these images (for example, Hans Retzlaff, Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, Erich Retzlaff, Otto Kolar, Hemke-Winterer, Friedrich Franz Bauer, etc.) honed their approach to show a people who were healthy and vital. What's more, these images were often imbued with a romantic mysticism, a closeness to the earth, to the soil of the progenitor 'ancestors'. These atavistic pictures are a photographic theatre. Although the people in the photographs are ordinary people,

57 Stetler, *Stop Reading! Look!* (2015), p. 181.

farmers and people (in the main) of the countryside, they are also actors on the photographer's stage. This was not an uncommon practice in the 1930s as the genre of documentary photography evolved. The 'story' was often told using 'real' actors.

These were spaces where the supernatural might be framed and thus suggested, in a 'real-world' setting, like the metaphorical and staged creative photography associated with modernism. These German photographers, were using their medium as a catalyst, as a visual philosopher's stone, to create an imaginative transmutation in the mind of the viewer and introduce 'a mythicized Germany... sacralised, restored as homeland, re-rooted, founded on a new order, united within a single community, healed of sickness, and purged of pollution.'⁵⁸ Whether or not all of these photographers themselves fully believed in the myth that they were framing is unknown.

The notion of a mythic Nordic-Atlantean progenitor race also presented Germany's *Reichsführer-SS* with an opportunity of seizing upon and proclaiming, a radical and a unique racial foundation for the Germanic peoples. This photography formed part of a corpus of visual evidence of a para-historical provenance of those 'purer-blooded' Germanic peoples, coloured as such readings were, with *völkisch*, occult notions of the Aryan as 'god-man'. With the financial and material support from Himmler's *Ahnenerbe*, even 'lowly' photography came to play a part in this process of alluding to a crypto-history of the Germans as descendants of a 'holy' progenitor race from a Nordic Atlantis. As the historian and specialist in Western Esotericism Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke has stated, this foundational myth of an Aryan descent from a Nordic Atlantis; '... reflected a utopian imperialism for those who bewailed the impotence and demoralization of the Weimar republic. Pessimists and opponents of the present were drawn to [the] idea that a revival of this Thuata-Atlantean culture would signal the rebirth of the Germanic race'.⁵⁹

To look upon these *völkisch* photographic folios, therefore, is to be presented with a performative, cataphoric mirror of silver, framed

58 Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 140.

59 Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 130.

within an occult mythos. The intended audience of the illustrated books and magazines was expected to identify with the photographs, to recognise that they were linked: it is an *identitarian* process. The aim was to reinforce a sense of connectedness to an organic society, to recognise a cultural and racial unity against the growing power of the forces of globalism (and the approaching struggle for existence). National Socialist ideologues, like their nationalist predecessors in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century *völkisch* mise-en-scène, exploited the power of an occult myth and thus integrated it into the overarching cultural programme of the regime. The mythlore, the crypto-history, embedded in these photographs, suggested that the origin of those people in the photographs (and by extension the reader or viewer who identified with them) had an alternative, 'holy', and unique origin in a primordial homeland distinct from all the other races of man. For those sympathetically nationalist photographers, their interpretation of these mystical ideas was coloured by such a *völkisch* interpretation, particularly in their photographs of the *Bauer*. Whilst employing the supposedly objective eye of the camera to produce the racial-physiognomic photograph, these portrayals also attempted to point to something beyond classification, and beyond these social and cultural conditions of the time. Their portraits of the peasant were certainly ideological in that they framed their sitters as representatives of an idealised and unsullied Germanic blood stock, but simultaneously they are meant to be suggestive of the spiritual. They attempt to point to the *numinous*. The mythos of these photographs was that this 'singular' race had come from *Ultima Thule*, *Atlantis*, *Hyperborea*... and as such they carried a divine spark unique to their blood. This suggestion was intended to be liberating, so that even the lowliest worker was framed as an aristocrat of humankind, the much vaunted *Übermensch* (Superman) with the earthly world as his deserved prize.