

'One Foot in Atlantis, One in Tibet'

The Roots and Legacies of Nazi Theories on Atlantis, 1890-1945

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The perception of a deep affinity between Nazism and the supernatural emerged only a few years after Hitler's seizure of power.¹ Already in the 1930s, the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung compared Hitler to a 'truly mystic medicine man... a form of spiritual vessel, a demi-deity', who managed to manipulate the unconscious of 78 million Germans.² In 1938 the German political scientist Erich Voegelin described Nazism as a 'political religion' comparing Hitler to the Egyptian emperor Akhenaton, who attempted to change the old ways 'so that he [might become the guide] to the mysteries of the gods.'³ Even the Nazi leader Alfred Rosenberg conceded that 'many Germans' embraced Nazism 'due to their proclivity for the romantic and the mystical, indeed the occult.'⁴ Most interesting for our purposes, the erstwhile Nazi turned critic, Hermann Rauschning, attributed Hitler's success to the fact that 'every German has one foot in Atlantis, where he seeks a better fatherland.'⁵

This idea of a lost but recoverable Aryan civilization with roots in Indo-European prehistory played a ubiquitous role in the Third Reich, finding its way, in varying forms, into Nazi theories on race, space, and religion. From the widespread belief in the evolutionary superiority of races from northern India to a fascination with Indo-Aryan religions; from Hitler's interest in the pseudoscience of World Ice Theory to Otto Rahn's search for the Holy Grail; from Heinrich Himmler and Alfred Rosenberg's

¹ I would like to thank Noah Katz, Marissa Hanley, and Mary Bernard for editorial assistance in composing this article.

E. Kurlander, 'Hitler's Monsters: The Occult Roots of Nazism and the Emergence of the Nazi "Supernatural Imaginary"', *German History* 30 (2012) 528-549; L. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen. Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (Berkeley, CA 1969) 3.

² H.R. Knickerbocker, 'Is Tomorrow Hitler's?', *Omnibook Magazine* (February 1942) 134; R.L. Sickinger, 'Hitler and the Occult: The Magical Thinking of Adolf Hitler', *Journal of Popular Culture* 34 (2000) 107-125.

³ M. Burleigh, 'National Socialism as a Political Religion', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 1 (2000) 1-26: 2-3.

⁴ Alfred Rosenberg Bundesarchiv, Berlin (BAB) NS 8/185, 49-50.

⁵ H. Rauschning, *Gespräche mit Hitler* (Zürich 2005) 208.

attempt to recover an ancient Aryan Ur-Civilization to Ernst Schäfer's Tibet expedition, a remarkable number of Nazi leaders embraced elements of an occult-inspired, mythology-fueled vision of Atlantis (or "Thule" in many rightwing and Nazi circles). This brief article will survey the genesis and influence of these ideas within the Nazi movement, from their roots in late-nineteenth century occultism and Indo-Aryan mythology to their deployment in the Third Reich.

The role of Atlantis in völkisch-esoteric politics and ideology before 1933

For many late-nineteenth century occultists and New Age thinkers, the lost civilization of Atlantis was believed to be the prehistoric source of divine, possibly extra-terrestrial, racial and spiritual perfection. In the view of Helena Blavatsky, founder of the occult doctrine known as Theosophy, Atlantis correlated with the mythic Buddhist lands of *Shambhala*, ostensibly located near Tibet, where the successors of the 'third root race' of the so-called Lemurians resided. After Atlantis' destruction through a global flood, the few survivors supposedly migrated to the highlands of the Himalayas, where they founded the secret society of Agartha. The later Nazi Tibet expedition had its roots in these views, derived from Blavatsky, who emphasized the importance of Tibetan wisdom as well as the evolutionary superiority of races from western China and northern India. Later Austro-German interpreters of Blavatsky, especially the Anthroposophists, Ariosophists (Iriminists) and World Ice Theorists, viewed Atlantis as the North Atlantic island civilization of Thule, the capital of a proto-Aryan civilization called Hyperborea whose Nordic remnants might be found in today's Helgoland or Iceland.⁶

⁶ C. Treitel, *Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore, MD 2004) 71-74; E. Howe, *Urania's Children* (London 1967) 84-87; W. Kaufmann, *Das Dritte Reich und Tibet* (Ludwigsfeld 2009) 131-135; N. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (Wellingborough 1985) 100-101; also see: Rudolf von Sebottendorff, 'Aus der Geschichte der Thule-Gesellschaft', *Thule-Bote* 1 (October 1933) 31, in: BAB: NS 26/865a, 28; E. Kurlander, 'The Orientalist Roots of National Socialism? Nazism, Occultism, and South Asian Spirituality, 1919-1945' in: J.M. Cho, E. Kurlander and D. McGetchin ed., *Transcultural Encounters between*

During the first two decades of the twentieth century the idea of an Ur-Aryan Thule or Atlantis found its way, via a number of völkisch-esoteric intellectuals and associations, into Nazi theories on race and space.⁷ Hitler's role model in demagogic politics, the populist mayor of Vienna Karl Lueger, was himself a member of the Ariosophic Guido von List society.⁸ Heinrich Himmler's mentor in ideological and spiritual matters and head of the SS archives, Karl Maria Wiligut, was an early twentieth century Ariosophist who believed in these theories of Atlantis, publishing a number of books on Armanist (Iriminist) religion and runology.⁹ So too was Theodor Fritsch, founder of the völkisch-esoteric German Order, which developed connections to many radical nationalist groups during the First World War. In fact two members of Fritsch's German Order, Rudolf von Sebottendorff and Walter Nauhaus, brought ideas of a lost Indo-Aryan civilization into its 1918 successor organization, the Thule Society.¹⁰

Sebottendorff and Nauhaus's Thule was clearly derived from earlier Theosophist obsession with Atlantis as a mystical refuge for the lost Aryan race. The society adopted an elaborate array of occult ideas and eastern symbols, including the swastika, which had a long history in Ariosophic circles, including List's *Armanen*, Liebenfels' Order of the New Templar, and Fritsch's German Order.¹¹ Within weeks of its founding Sebottendorff

Germany and India: Kindred Spirits in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (New York, NY and London 2014) 155-169.

⁷ U. Puschner, 'The Notions *Völkisch* and *Nordic*' in: H. Junginger and A. Ackerlund ed., *Nordic Ideology Between Religion and Scholarship* (Frankfurt 2013) 21-32; also see: U. Puschner, *Die völkische Bewegung im wilhelminischen Kaiserreich* (Darmstadt 2001).

⁸ L. Pammer, 'Hitlers Vorbilder: Dr. Karl Lueger', *Antifa-Info* 110-111 (April-June 2003) 3-4: 9-11. B. Pauley, *From Prejudice to Persecution: A History of Austrian Anti-Semitism* (Chapel Hill, NC 1992) 42-45.

⁹ M. Kater, *Der Abnenerbe der SS: 1935-1945* (Stuttgart 1974) 12-13; also see: H. Pringle, *The Master Plan: Himmler's Scholars and the Holocaust*, (New York, NY 2006) 54-57; R.W. Brednich, 'The Weigel Symbol Archive and the Ideology of National Socialist Folklore' in: J.R. Dow and H. Lixfeld ed., *The Nazification of an Academic Discipline: Folklore in the Third Reich* (Bloomington, IN 1994) 97-111: 100-105; H. Junginger, 'Intro' in: Junginger and Ackerlund ed., *Nordic Ideology* (Frankfurt 2013) 8-9.

¹⁰ Goodrick-Clarke, *Roots*, 194-198; Puschner, '*Völkisch* and *Nordic*', 21-32.

¹¹ H. Gilbhard, *Die Thule-Gesellschaft. Vom okkulten Mummenschanz zum Hakenkreuz* (München 1994) 10-15; A. Strohmeyer, *Von Hyperborean ach Auschwitz: Wege eines*

had purchased the Munich (later Racial) Observer, which would become the flagship Nazi paper, to promote Thule ideas. In October 1918, two leaders of the Thule, Karl Harrer and Anton Drexler, created a Political Worker's Circle. In January 1919 the same two leaders refashioned their informal circle into the German Worker's Party (DAP), which Hitler joined in September of that year.¹² There were subtle differences between the occult-inspired Thule Society and the nascent DAP. The Thule Society, similar to the German Order, represented a largely bourgeois and even aristocratic constituency, which had the time and means to spend their afternoons at the Four Seasons Hotel listening to lectures on runes, astrology, or the civilization of Atlantis (or the Thule). The DAP, on the other hand, had mostly lower middle class and even some working class members who met in a local tavern. But these differences belie the fact that the early DAP was profoundly indebted and closely connected, both ideologically and organizationally, to the Atlantis-inspired Thule Society.¹³

To be sure, Hitler actively tried to disassociate the DAP from the Thule, largely due to the latter's heavily bourgeois, elitist character and Sebottendorff's proclivity to favor the German Socialist Party (DSP) over the German Worker's Party. Hitler also renamed the DAP the National Socialist German Worker's Party (NSDAP) in 1920. But the NSDAP nonetheless inherited the Thule Society's interest in völkisch-esotericism and Atlantis.¹⁴ Many former Thule Society members, numerous associates of Fritsch's German Order, and a bevy of occult fellow travelers played an integral role in the formation of the Nazi party.¹⁵ The party had no problem affiliating itself with Ariosophists for whom Atlantean theories of racial

antiken Mythos (Witten 2005); D. Rose, *Die Thule-Gesellschaft* (2008 Tübingen) 37-39; BAB: NS 26/865a, 'Zur 1000 – Jahr – Verfassungsfeier Islands (930-1930) am 26.-28. Juni liegt abgeschlossen vor Thule: Altnordische Dichtung und Prosa', 24 volumes, republished by F. Miedner with the assistance of P. Herrmann i.a., Eugen Diederichs report in Jena.

¹² R. Howe, *Rudolph Freiherr von Sebottendorff* (unpublished manuscript 1968) 14.

¹³ Howe, *Sebottendorff*, 66-68.

¹⁴ R. von Sebottendorf, *Bevor Hitler kam: Urkundlich aus der Frühzeit der Nationalsozialistischen Bewegung* (Munich 1933) 14-15.

¹⁵ R. Phelps, 'Before Hitler Came', *Journal of Modern History* (hereafter: JMH) 70-76; Rose, *Thule Gesellschaft*, 10-11; M. Kellogg, *The Russian Roots of Nazism* (Cambridge 2005), 70.

degeneration and rebirth remained central.¹⁶ The Nazi paper, *The Racial Observer*, continued publishing articles by völkisch-esotericists who employed the Atlantean (Thulean) language of List, Liebenfels and Fritsch.¹⁷

Some members of the NSDAP also participated in pagan solstice festivals inspired by 'the völkisch ideas of Guido von List', which employed the supernatural trappings drawn from Ariosophic conceptions of lost Indo-Aryan civilization. The terrible crisis of the early years of the Republic, reported one speaker at the December 1920 winter solstice festival, had been 'prophesied' in the Edda and the teachings of the Armanen, concluding that one day 'more happy times will come for the Aryan race.'¹⁸ In summer 1921 the NSDAP co-sponsored a solstice festival, replete with nods to 'Baldur, the sun-god' and the 'sun-hero and son of god Siegfried.'¹⁹ Even the Nazi battle call prior to the 9 November 1923 putsch, 'featured concepts derived from Madame Blavatsky and popularized by Theodor Fritsch (...) The eternal struggle between Ormuzd and Ahriman, between light and darkness, has once again ended in the victory of the sun, whose symbol is the ancient Aryan sign of salvation: the swastika!'²⁰

The preoccupation with recovering a lost Indo-Aryan race and religion, prevalent across the völkisch movement, found its way into the early Nazi party.²¹ Echoing the Atlantean foundations of Indo-Aryan racial and religious theories, the Nazis chief ideologue Alfred Rosenberg claimed that the ancient Aryans from northwest India and Persia had founded all great civilizations, before they declined due to intermingling with lesser races and the deleterious role of Judeo-Christianity.²² Heinrich Himmler was

¹⁶ Kater, *Ahnenerbe*, 17-18; 10.16.34 letter from Gauamtsleiter Graf praising Schmid; 12.10.34 letter from Graf allowing him to step down with congratulations on great work; document with all activity through 1934, Frenzolf Schmid's letter to RSK, 8.12.35, in BAK: R 9361-V/10777; S. Koehne, 'Were the National Socialists a Völkisch Party? Paganism, Christianity, and the Nazi Christmas', *Central European History* 47.4 (2014) 760-790: 766-69.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 778-779.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 777-778.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 781-783.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 786-787.

²¹ U. Puschner, 'Weltanschauung und Religion, Religion und Weltanschauung. Ideologie und Formen völkischer Religion', *Zeitenblicke* 5.1 (2006). http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2006/1/Puschner/index_html, accessed 22-11-2016.

²² C.-E. Bärsch, *Die politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus* (München 2002) 198-199, 206-208; L. Spence, *The Occult Causes of the Present War* 128-129, 144-146; A.

invested in similar ideas, believing in a close connection between ancient Nordic civilization and the people and religion of Tibet.²³ Himmler, Hess and other Nazi leaders, apparently influenced by conceptions of an Ur-Aryan (Atlantean) race with superhuman powers, believed in the existence of magical or occult power:

(...) capable of being channeled, controlled, and directed by man. [A] magical tradition [that] has very deep roots in the human past (...) an essential part of life and certainly an essential part of political life, because its primary purpose was to give human beings power.²⁴

The occult predilections of Himmler and Hess are well known. But in 1920 Hitler himself gave an Atlantean-tinged speech that relied on Ariosophic writers such as Guido von List and Theodor Fritsch. Hitler began with a gloss on List's Atlantean-inspired view of German prehistory:

[the] Aryan, during the ice age, engaged in building his spiritual and bodily strength in the hard fight with nature, arising quite differently than other races who lived without struggle in the midst of a bountiful world. (...) We know that all of these people held one sign in common, the symbol of the sun. All of their cults were built on light, and you can find this symbol, the means of the generation of fire, the Quirl, the cross. You can find this cross as a swastika not only here [in Germany], but also exactly the same [symbol] carved into temple posts in India and Japan. It is the swastika of the community (Gemeinwesen) once founded by Aryan culture (Kultur).²⁵

'Human culture and civilization on this continent are inseparably bound up with the presence of the Aryan,' Hitler explained four years later, 'If he dies out or declines, the dark veils of an age without culture will descend on this

Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (München 1934) 21-144; D. Bronder, *Bevor Hitler Kam* (n.p. 1975) 219-225.

²³ Pringle, *Plan*, 150; H. Junginger, 'Nordic Ideology in the SS and SS Ahnenerbe' in: Junginger and Ackerlund ed., *Nordic Ideology*, 49-54.

²⁴ Sickinger, 'Hitler and the Occult', 112; Rauschnig, *Gespräche*, 245.

²⁵ S. Koehne, 'Nazi Christmas', 773-774, B. Mees, 'Hitler and Germanentum', *Journal of Contemporary History* 39.2 (2004) 255-270: 269-270.

globe.²⁶

In *Mein Kampf* and later speeches Hitler echoed Atlantean-centered theories drawn from Ariosophy, stating that racial miscegenation had led to ‘monstrosities halfway between man and ape.’²⁷ In a passage reminiscent of Lanz or Blavatsky, Hitler argued that:

The Aryan gave up the purity of his blood, and, therefore, lost his sojourn in the paradise which he had made for himself. He became submerged in the racial mixture, and gradually, more and more, lost his cultural capacity, until at last, not only mentally but also physically, he began to resemble the subjected aborigines more than his own ancestors (...) Blood mixture and the resultant drop in the racial level is the sole cause of the dying out of old cultures.²⁸

It becomes clear that already before coming to power important Nazi leaders shared a proclivity for völkisch-esoteric beliefs centered on the idea of a lost Indo-Aryan (Atlantean or Thulean) civilization.²⁹ The question is whether these ideas made their way into the theory and practice of National Socialism during the Third Reich.

The role of Atlantis in Nazi occultism and border scientific thinking

Nazi leaders did not embrace occult doctrines uncritically. But where no ideological opposition was present, the Third Reich proved remarkably open to Atlantis-inspired esotericism and fringe (border) science.³⁰ Asked to conduct a background check on a former member of Fritsch’s German Order, the SS responded that ‘The German Order belongs to the völkisch orders that sought the völkisch renewal of Germany’, meaning that erstwhile members of the German Order may be party comrades without

²⁶ D. Redles, *Hitler’s Millennial Reich. Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation* (Boston, MA 2005) 71-72.

²⁷A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich 1924) 402, 324; Redles, *Millienial Reich*, 67, 70-71.

²⁸J. Spielvogel and D. Redles, ‘Hitler’s Racial Ideology: Content and Occult Source’, *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* 3 (1986) 227-246; A. Rabinach and S.L. Gilman, *The Third Reich Sourcebook* (Berkeley, CA 2013) 113.

²⁹ Howe, *Urania’s Children*, 126-127.

³⁰ Treitel, *Science*, 209; *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) report on Anthroposophy and Ariosophy in (BAB): R 58/64, 45-48.

any restrictions.³¹ An individual who belonged to the Ariosophic Skalden Order was accepted into the party as well because the Skalden ‘belonged to the völkisch lodges and orders (...) that especially prior to the war preserved a German tradition that was taken from German prehistory and that strived for an empowerment of the German people.’³² When Sebottendorff returned to Germany in 1933, the Third Reich even permitted the refoundation of the Thule Society.³³

As long as they were ‘in solidarity with Hitler’s antimaterialism, on the one hand, and aggressive nationalism, on the other’, the Third Reich tolerated and in some respects embraced occult groups that propagated the idea of a lost, Ur-Aryan (Atlantean) civilization.³⁴ For this reason many Nazis, from Rudolf Hess to the Reich Minister for Church Affairs Hans Kerrl to the SS General Otto Ohlendorff, insisted the regime tolerate Anthroposophic-based doctrines and institutions.³⁵ As Ohlendorff and argued, Anthroposophy was authentically German and therefore perfectly compatible with Nazism.³⁶

Another indication of the continuing links between Atlantean-inspired border science and the Third Reich is World Ice Theory

³¹ BAB: R 58/6217, Himmler’s office to DAF, 4.28.39, 1-2.

³² SD reports from 5.24.39, in BAB: R 58/6217; N. Goodrick-Clarke, *Roots*, 118-119, 170-171, 192-197; A. Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler’s “Green Party”* (Abbotsbrook 1985) 52-53, 95-96, 125-129; Goodrick-Clarke, *Roots*, 170.

³³ *Thule-Bote* 1 (October 1934) 31, in: BAB: NS 26/2232; Phelps, ‘Before Hitler Came’, *JMH*, 35; Howe, *Sebottendorff*, 66-68.

³⁴ Treitel, *Science*, 204-205, 227-228; P. Staudenmaier, ‘Nazi Perceptions of Esotericism: The Occult as Fascination and Menace’ in: A. Manthripraganda ed., *The Threat and Allure of the Magical* (Cambridge 2013) 31-35; BAB: R58/6203: 4.13.36, voluntary dissolution of Theosophischen Gesellschaft; P. Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Nazism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era* (Boston, MA 2014) 223-226; U. Werner, *Anthroposophen in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus (1933-1945)* (München 1999) 7-13; report on Anthroposophy in BAB: R 58/64, 2-18; Werner, *Anthroposophen*, 47-50.

³⁵ Werner, *Anthroposophen*, 7-8, 32-50, 66-72, 143-147, 194-196, 212-221, 341; Staudenmaier, *Between Nazism and Occultism*, 101-116; Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, 176; P. Staudenmaier, ‘Organic Farming in Nazi Germany: The Politics of Biodynamic Agriculture, 1933–1945’, *Environmental History* (2013) 14.

³⁶ Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Nazism*, 117-119; Staudenmaier, ‘Nazi Perceptions of Esotericism’, 39-45.

(*Welteislehre* or WEL).³⁷ Its progenitor, Hans Hörbiger, was a brilliant charlatan with little scientific background, who made it easy for the public to ‘digest the fantastical’ by imitating natural scientific language, rituals, and images.³⁸ WEL posited an alternative history of the universe and humanity based on ice planets and moons crashing into earth. It proved especially attractive to völkisch-esoteric thinkers who wanted to institutionalize an Aryan (Atlantean) alternative to materialist, ‘Jewish’ science.³⁹

WEL was perfectly compatible with an Atlantocentric, Nazi cosmology. Both Nordic mythology and Theosophic-inspired occult doctrines such as Anthroposophy and Ariosophy posited a series of Ur-cataclysms and ice ages, which caused biological mutations in earth’s inhabitants, producing gigantic animals as well as giant human beings, Atlantean supermen and monstrous humanoids. Weaned on Wagner and Chamberlain, Steiner and Lanz von Liebenfels, many Nazis recognized in WEL their suspicion that the ancient Aryans (Atlanteans) had been hunted down and mostly destroyed by their former *Tschandal* slaves. In short, WEL fit perfectly well with Wagnerian visions and Ariosophic ideas of Atlantis and root races we discussed in paragraphe One.⁴⁰

WEL was probably the only border science that Hitler embraced wholly and with conviction.⁴¹ He read the fanciful books authored by its proponents and truly believed predictive qualities when it came to geological and meteorological phenomena.⁴² Hitler also ostensibly opined to Himmler that there is much discussion of ‘pre-moon humanity’ in Greek sources, which likely has to do with the ‘World Empire of Atlantis, that fell

³⁷ C. Wessely, ‘Cosmic Ice Theory – science, fiction and the public, 1894–1945’. [Http://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/en/research/projects/DeptIII-ChristinaWessely-Welteislehre](http://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/en/research/projects/DeptIII-ChristinaWessely-Welteislehre), accessed 20 December 2017.

³⁸ M. Halter, ‘Essay – Manuskriptdienst: Zivilisation ist Eis. Hanns Hörbigers Welteislehre – eine Metapher des Kältetods im 20. Jahrhundert’, *Südwest Rundfunk* 2, 15 July 2008, 21.03 Uhr.

³⁹ C. Wessely, *Welteis: Ein wahre Geschichte* (Berlin 2013) 165, 215-22; C. Wessely, ‘Welteis, Die “Astronomie des Unsichtbaren” um 1900’ in: D. Rupnow et al. ed., *Subrkamp Verlag* (Frankfurt am Main 2008) 178-188.

⁴⁰ Wessely, *Welteis*, 223-226, 233-237; Kater, *Abnenerbe*, 151.

⁴¹ R. Bowen, *Universal Ice: Science and Ideology in the Nazi State* (London 1993) 3-6.

⁴² N. Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York, NY 2003) 133; letter: ‘Der Führer äusserte im Frühjahr dieses Jares im Gespräch den Reichsführer gegenüber’ from 8.04.42 in: BAB: MA 3/8; Von Hase to Hitler, 7.11.36; Hitler to von Hase, 7.14.37; BAB: NS 21/714.

victim to the catastrophe of the moons falling to earth.⁴³ We cannot ignore the possibility that World Ice Theory determined major military decisions, as Hitler seemingly believed that Operation Barbarossa had a better chance of success because the World Ice Theorists had predicted a mild winter.⁴⁴ Also based on WEL, Hitler and Himmler conjectured that Nordic soldiers were better prepared for fighting in cold weather than Slavs and consequently may have failed to equip them properly for war on the Eastern front.⁴⁵

Equally illustrative of WEL's widespread acceptance is the fact that Hitler's normally more sober and pragmatic second-in-command, Hermann Göring, was an enthusiastic supporter, as was the head of the German Youth Movement Baldur von Schirach.⁴⁶ WEL's proponents included both heads of Himmler's Institute for Ancestral Research [*Ahnenerbe*], the Atlantomaniacal Hermann Wirth and Walther Wüst, as well as Chief of the Third Reich's press corps, Albert Herrmann, who wrote a book arguing that the original Atlantis was in Tunisia.⁴⁷ Even the Nazi labor czar, Robert Ley, is reported claiming that 'Our Nordic ancestors grew strong in ice and snow: belief in the World Ice is consequently the natural heritage of Nordic Man.'⁴⁸

For Himmler, World Ice Theory was the scientific and metaphysical expression of an ancient Indo-Aryan (Atlantean) civilization.⁴⁹ According to Himmler, 'the Aryans did not evolve from apes like the rest of humanity,

⁴³ V. Trimondi, *Hitler, Buddha, Krishna. Eine unbeilige Allianz vom Dritten Reich bis heute*. (Ueberreuter 2002), 268; Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 133.

⁴⁴ Wessely, *Welteis*, 257-261; also see various letters in: P. Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler* (Oxford 2013) 282; and in: BAB: NS 21/770, Sievers to Giustiani, 9.17.37; Sievers to Langdorff, 7.13.37; 2.01.43, Scultetus prooted to Sturmbannführer; 9.13.41—Scultetus writes Sievers; 10.14.41 sends Sievers update; 10.25.41 Sievers writes back nicely, hoping he does his job well and comes back with more enthusiasm; 1.09.42 to Sievers thanking for Ahnenerbe report; 6.14.42 Scultetus to Sievers; 11.20.42 Scultetus to Sievers acknowledging gratefulness to Himmler. BAB: NS 21/770.

⁴⁵ Wessely, *Welteis*, 258-259; Willy Ley, 'Pseudoscience in Naziland', *Astounding Science Fiction* 39 (1947) 98; Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 133.

⁴⁶ Wessely, *Welteis*, 238-239; Kater, *Ahnenerbe*, 51.

⁴⁷ Kater, *Ahnenerbe*, 51.

⁴⁸ Willy Ley, 'Pseudoscience in Naziland', 98.

⁴⁹ Bowen, *Universal Ice*, 16.

but are gods come directly from heaven to earth.’⁵⁰ These ancient superhumans possessed ‘paranormal powers and extraordinary weapons’ such as the ‘Thunder Hammer’ we associate with Thor. The myth of Thor’s hammer, per Himmler, ‘didn’t have to do with natural thunder and lightning, but (...) pertained to an earlier, highly developed tool of our ancestors that was obviously only in the possession of a few, namely the Asen who were gods and were privy to an unheard of knowledge of electricity.’⁵¹

With Hitler’s support, Himmler made an enormous effort to sponsor border scientists who endorsed WEL. The most famous example is Hitler and Himmler’s support for Hörbiger’s elderly co-author Philip Fauth, an amateur scientist whose theories were perched on that ‘narrow intersection between the pure scientific and the speculative and fantastical.’⁵² The same held for Edmund Kiss, who wrote a series of novels about the rise and fall of Atlantean civilization, with WEL as a core philosophy. So too did the SA leader and rabidly anti-Semitic writer Rudolf von Elmayer-Vestenbrugg. By the time he published his most influential book, *The Enigma of Universal Phenomena* (1937), Elmayer had developed an entire cosmology around World Ice Theory, arguing that WEL would replace Darwin’s theory of evolution and that the Aryan race had been incubated in the arctic world of Hörbiger’s mythic past before founding the civilization of Atlantis.⁵³

Through his Institute for Ancestral Research (*Abnenerbe*) Himmler and his first director, the Atlantis specialist Hermann Wirth, sponsored dozens of border scientists in investigating Atlantean-inspired theories of race and space. Wirth’s many foreign expeditions sought evidence for the idea of an ancient Nordic civilization in the Atlantic and then insinuated the extension of German Empire to the North.⁵⁴ Even marginal territories, such as the once Danish (later British) island of Helgoland, were explored under

⁵⁰ Kater, *Abnenerbe*, 50; BAB: MA 3/8, Himmler to Wüst, 3.06.38.

⁵¹ Kater, *Abnenerbe*, 51-52.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 52.

⁵³ Bowen, *Universal Ice*, 49-50, 130-149; R. Elmayer, *Georg Ritter von Schönerer: Der Vater des politischen Antisemitismus. Von einem, der ihm selbst erlebt hat* (München 1942); BAB: N S21/699 (WEL), Scultetus to Elmayer, 12.21.36; H. Hörbiger and P. Fauth, *Glazialkosmogonie* (1913).

⁵⁴ Pringle, *Plan*, 187-190; See Fehrle’s 1939-1942 correspondence and Swedish cliff pictures: BAB: NS 21/1295; also see: E. Hartmann, *Trollborstellungen*, 2; Rheden bio of Darré in: BAK: N 1094I/77. 35.

⁵⁴J.R. Angola, David Littlejohn and C..M. Dodkins, *Edged weaponry of the Third Reich* (Mountain View, CA 1974), 132-135.

the umbrella of folklore studies and völkisch border science – in this case to determine whether the island was the remnant of Atlantis.⁵⁵ Himmler and Wirth also encouraged research on subterranean energies and ley lines, including ‘Atlantian-Germanic Circles’, ‘triangles of Spirit’, and the Aryan pentagram.⁵⁶ The ancient German ‘extraordinary understanding of electricity’, Himmler advised his Ahnenerbe scientists, should be investigated to see whether it was inherited from the Norse Gods.⁵⁷

Nazi attempts to recover the original Thule civilization (Atlantis) in northern Europe were closely linked to the search for the remnants of a lost Atlantean civilization in Tibet.⁵⁸ As J.W. Hauer put it, German racial science emphasized both ‘blood and spirit’ and the ‘cosmic-ethical laws of karma’ drawn from northern India.⁵⁹ Hauer, Günther, the head of the SS *Ahnenerbe* Walther Wüst and other Nazi racial ‘experts’ furthermore claimed that the Indian caste order derived from racial categories since ‘the word for caste is *varna*; and *varna* means color.’ This Aryan racial purity, preserved by the elite racial castes in India and Tibet, were only corrupted by the Mongol invasions, as their original Atlantean (Thulean) forbears had been millennia earlier.⁶⁰

Such far-fetched claims for Nordic overlords in Asia also made a deep impression on Himmler, who was keen to unearth hard archaeological

⁵⁵ Heinrich Pudor wants Ahnenerbe stipend. Letter from Brandt to Galke, 12.07.37; Pudor letter, 11.07.41 asking for money for Helgoland research; Sievers to Pudor, 11.11.41; Pudor book with Anti-Semitism and Atlantis material, p. 23. Heinrich Pudor: BAB: NS 21/2215.

⁵⁶ Schäfer to Brandt, 6.25.40 in: BAB: N19/2709, 3-6; Letter from Sturmbannführer Frenzolf Schmid, 3.21.37 in: BAB: NS 19/3974, 10-11; letter from SS on Schmid’s behalf, 1.11.37; 5.04.40 RSK; 12.10.34 letter from Graf, BAB: R 9361-V/10777.

⁵⁷ Longerich, *Himmler*, 266.

⁵⁸ V. Lipphardt, ‘Das “schwarze Schaf” der Biowissenschaftler. Ausgrenzungen und Rehabilitierungen der Rassenforschung im 20. Jahrhundert’ in: idem ed., *Pseudowissenschaft: Konzeptionen von Nicht-/Wissenschaftlichkeit in der Wissenschaftsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main 2008) 223-250: 236-247; See Geisthovel, *Intelligenz und Rasse*; Pringle, *Plan*, 11, 90, 135-136; Fritz Bose, ‘Law and Freedom in the Interpretation of European Folk Epics’, *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 10 (1958) 31.

⁵⁹ Trimondi, *Hitler*, 48; Staudenmaier, *Between Nazism and Occultism*, 159-161

⁶⁰ Trimondi, *Hitler*, 79; Staudenmaier, *Occultism*, 149; Gilbhard, *Die Thule-Gesellschaft*, 17-18; M.H. Kater, ‘Artamanen – Völkische Jugend in der Weimarer Republik’, *Historische Zeitschrift* 213 (1971) 577-638: 598-604.

proof of these ‘gold-haired’ conquerors.⁶¹ Himmler believed that ancient emigrants from Atlantis founded ‘a great civilization in Inner Asia, the capital of which was called Obo.’ He also mentioned Oshima’s belief in a similar theory concerning the origin of the noble castes in Japan.⁶² ‘The elites of Asia— The Brahman priests, the Mongolian chiefs, and the Japanese samurai,’ Himmler argued, ‘all descended from ancient European conquerors.’⁶³ Himmler believed, like many Atlantomaniacal völkisch thinkers, that WEL confirmed the theory that the Chinese and Japanese were ‘once colonial races with a central state’ who ‘originated from people who centuries or millenia earlier had had an Atlantean ruling class. This Atlantean ruling class had impressed its stamp upon the language and culture of these peoples.’⁶⁴

Although less preoccupied by these Atlantean ideas than Himmler, Hitler was clearly influenced by these ideas.⁶⁵ He attended lectures by Hans H.K Günther, for example, who claimed that the Aryans had launched their first assault into Asia nearly 4000 years ago. Some made it to Japan and China, becoming nobles, Günther suggested, which was why the aristocracy of China and Japan had Nordic traits ‘a decidedly long skull and an almost white skin, sometimes combined with handsome European features.’⁶⁶ The rest of the Aryans swept through the Caucasus and pushed into India. There they made a caste system to protect their bloodline and ‘a wealthy young Nordic couple gave birth to a prince – Buddha.’⁶⁷ The fact that Hitler, Himmler and other Nazi leaders shared these views indicates the link between Atlantean-inspired border science and Indo-Aryan religion.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Pringle, *Plan*, 146-147.

⁶² Ibidem, 150.

⁶³ Pringle, *Plan*, 145-146.

⁶⁴ Kater, *Abnenerbe*, 51.

⁶⁵ C. Spang, *Karl Haushofer und Japan. Die Rezeption seiner geopolitischen Theorien in der deutschen und japanischen Politik* (München 2013) 414.

⁶⁶ Pringle, *Plan*, 135-136.

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

⁶⁸ For more on Nazi attitudes toward ‘border science’, see: E. Kurlander, ‘The Nazi Magician’s Controversy: Enlightenment, “Border Science”, and Occultism in the Third Reich’, *Central European History* 48 (2015) 498-522.

The role of Atlantis in Nazi religious thinking

Plucked from obscurity by the SS's chief esotericist, Karl Maria Wiligut, the Nazi philologist Otto Rahn was tasked by Heinrich Himmler with conducting research on the Holy Grail. Rahn's first book, *Quest for the Grail* (1933), argued that the Cathars' practiced a variation on Tibetan-Buddhist religion originally invented in Nordic Atlantis. Transferred to Tibet after the flood, these religious traditions returned to the Germanic peoples via northern India and Persia millennia later.⁶⁹ Rahn embraced the Theosophic-Ariosophic Atlantean myth of Shambhala, a lost Aryan civilization from the north, and noted that European Catharism and Tibetan Buddhism shared many features.⁷⁰ The Grail, according to Rahn, came from the Indian *mani*, the symbol for a stone fallen from heaven, which had been brought to Europe by a white dove from the Himalayas.⁷¹

Rahn's second book, *Lucifer's Court* (1937), went further. It speculated that the Grail lay at the center of a Cathar Luciferians (light bearers) who protected the Grail according to the old Indo-Aryan tradition of the Thule (*Shambhala*) drawn from survivors of the flood who settled Tibet and Northern India.⁷² Accused of heresy and witchcraft, these last representatives of the proto-Aryan civilization of Atlantis (Thule) were mostly eradicated by the Catholic Church. But their teachings, Rahn speculated, were preserved by occult groups such as the Theosophists into the modern period.⁷³ Rahn's work buttressed the belief among many SS researchers that the Catholic Church had invented heresy and witchcraft trials in order to eliminate the religion practiced by Indo-Aryans who survived the collapse of Atlantis.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Lange, *Rahn*, 22-24; Kaufmann, *Tibet*, 175; M. Hesemann, *Hitlers Religion. Die fatale Heilslehre des Nationalsozialismus* (München 2004) 345–348.

⁷⁰ Kaufmann, *Tibet*, 173-175; F. Wegener, *Alfred Schuler, Der Letzte Deutsche Katharer. Gnosis, Nationalsozialismus und Mystische Blutleuchte* (Gladbeck 2003) 67-68; Wegener, *Himmler*, 90; Hesemann, *Hitlers Religion*, 345–348; O. Rahn, *Kreuzzug gegen den Gral. Teil I* (1933) 137.

⁷¹ Kaufmann, *Tibet*, 175; Lange, *Rahn*, 22-24; Goodrick-Clarke, *Roots*, 189; Wegener, *Himmler*, 17-18.

⁷² Rahn, *Lucifers Hofgesind. Eine Reise zu den guten Geistern Europas* (1937) 9; J. Godwin, *Arktos. Der polare Mythos zwischen NS-Ökultismus und moderner Esoterik* (Graz 2007) 110–111; Lange, *Rahn*, 21–22, 26, 42.

⁷³ Brandt to Best, April 1943 in: BAB: NS 19/688.

⁷⁴ Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 134-135.

A number of Nazi intellectuals found proof in these ideas of their Atlantean-inspired, Indo-Aryan religious theories.⁷⁵ The geopolitican Karl Haushofer, who had an important influence on Hitler and Hess, evinced great interest in Shinto and Tibetan-Buddhist religion, which included practicing yoga, obtaining an audience with the Dalai Lama, and studying Sanskrit.⁷⁶ The Nazi race theorist Günther likewise argued that Buddhism was inspired by the ancient Nordic tribes which swept into East and South Asia, providing both the ruling Brahman caste and ancient Japanese samurai.⁷⁷ Himmler's personal amanuensis Wiligut was fascinated by Tibetan legends, practiced yoga, and once described an out-of-body experience in which he passed a test by Tibetan priests.⁷⁸ He also claimed that German runes derived from a common Indo-European language that appeared in Tibetan as well as Central Asian and Chinese script.⁷⁹ Indeed, when Rauschnig observed that every German has one foot in Atlantis and one in Tibet, he was referring to this widespread belief in the ethno-religious connections between the lost Ario-Germanic civilization of the Thule (Atlantis) and an Indo-Aryan civilization centered in northern India.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Darré diary in NL Darré, BAK: N 1094I-65a, 31-34; Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, 75-77, 80-90, 133; S. Koehne, 'Nazi Christmas' 788-789; R. Cecil, *The Myth of the Master Race: Alfred Rosenberg and Nazi Ideology* (Michigan 2008) 95; R. Schweidlenka and E. Gugenberger, *Die Fäden der Nornen* (1993) 166-167; I. Hexham, 'Inventing "Paganists": a Close Reading of Richard Steigmann-Gall's The Holy Reich', *Journal of Contemporary History* 42 (2007) 61-62; S. Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ 2010); Frenzolf Schmid, 3.21.37 in: BAB: NS 19, 3974., 9; also see: Sievers to Schmid, 3.31.42; Schmid to Himmler, 1.17.39, 7.23.40 in: BAB: NS 21/2294; Reichstein to Schmid, 7.08.43, letter from SS to Reichstein, 6.21.43, Schmid to Languth, 1.11.37, 1.24.37, 3.10.39, in R 9361-V/10777; Kater, *Ahnenerbe*, 51-52; R. Greve, 'Tibetforschung im SS Ahnenerbe' in: T. Hauschild ed., *Lebenslust durch Fremdenfurcht* (Frankfurt am Main 1995) 168-209; H.J. Glowka, *Deutsche Okkultgruppen 1875-1937* (1981) 111-115.

⁷⁶ A. Berzin, 'The Nazi Connection with Shambhala and Tibet' (May 2003). [Http://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/history-culture/shambhala/the-nazi-connection-with-shambhala-and-tibet](http://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/history-culture/shambhala/the-nazi-connection-with-shambhala-and-tibet), accessed 20 December 2016.

⁷⁷ H.F.K. Günther, *The Racial Elements of European History* (London 1927); H.F.K. Günther, *Die nordische Rasse bei den Indogermanen Asiens* (Munich 1934); Pringle, *Plan*, 3-11.

⁷⁸ Trimondi, *Hitler*, 104-105.

⁷⁹ R.W. Brednich, 'The Weigel Symbol Archive', 97-111.

⁸⁰ C. Goepfert, *Immer noch Aberglaube!* (Zürich 1943) 3-11.

Rahn's theories therefore reinforced the 'wild Atlantean Runomania' of many SS leaders. To prove the existence of a two million year old Irminist religion at the center of an Indo-Aryan (Atlantean) civilization, which had been destroyed by cataclysm and preserved in ancient runes, Himmler organized expeditions to Scandinavia and Palaeolithic sites across Europe.⁸¹ The two successive heads of Himmler's *Abnenerbe*, Wirth and Wüst, were particularly important in promoting the common religious links between Germany and Tibet. Wirth himself saw no problem in insisting on the shared race and culture between Nordic, 'Hyperboreans' who lived in the city-state Ultima Thule and the Indo-Aryan peoples of the Veda, Brahmana and Mahabharata.⁸² Wüst also saw the Germans as descendants of Atlantis, an ancient Indo-Germanic empire whose religious teachings survived in South Asian Buddhism, preserved by the monks of Tibet.⁸³ Echoing the myth of Atlantis, Wüst argued this Indo-European civilization exemplified by the Indian and Persian had broken down through migration and racial mixing. Their last vestiges were "The symbols, the swastika and the wheel or the ideas of Cakravartin World rulers."⁸⁴

Wüst wanted to (re)create a religion that combined Nordic runes and Hindu-Buddhist rituals and principles in a 'constructive synthesis' on the parallels of the Germanic sagas and the Indian myths.⁸⁵ Even German folk traditions and fairy tales, Wüst suggested, contained Indo-Aryan (Atlantean)

⁸¹ Pringle, *Plan*, 59-60, 73-75; Longerich, *Himmler*, 224; J. Rudolf, "'Geheime Reichskommando-Sache!' – Hexenjäger im Schwarzen Orden. Der H-Sonderauftrag des Reichsführers-SS, 1935-1944' in: S. Lorenz et al. ed., *Himmlers Hexenkartothek. Das Interesse des Nationalsozialismus an der Hexenverfolgung* (Bielefeld 1999) 55-58; B. Mees, 'Hitler and Germanentum' 261-263; B. Mees, *The Science of the Swastika* (Budapest 2008) 180-181; F. Paul, *History of the Scandinavian Languages at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. A preliminary Sketch* (Göttingen 1985); Kater, *Abnenerbe*, 196-197; W. Krause, *Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark* (Halle 1937); U. Hunger, *Die Runenkunde im Dritten Reich. Ein Beitrag zur Wissenschafts- und Ideologegeschichte des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt 1984); Lange, *Otto Rahn. Leben und Werk*, 27-28, 56-63; Goodrick Clarke, *Roots*, 189; Kersten, *Memoirs*, 152-154; Redles, *Reich*, 53-57; Lange, *Rahn*, 16; Longerich, *Himmler*, 294-296.

⁸² Trimondi, *Hitler*, 37-38.

⁸³ Wüst, *Indogermanische Bekenntnisse* (Berlin 1943) 10-12, 19-20.

⁸⁴ Trimondi, *Hitler*, 22.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, 41-44; H. Junginger, 'From Buddha To Adolf Hitler: Walther Wüst And The Aryan Tradition', in: *idem* ed., *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism*, (Leiden 2007) 105-178.

roots.⁸⁶ Similar to Hess, Darré, Himmler, and Hitler, among others, Wüst admired Shinto spirituality and religious traditions as well – offering a powerful ethno-religious basis for German-Japanese rapprochement.⁸⁷ Wüst acknowledged, like Hauer, the positive impact of Anthroposophy, which introduced elements of Hinduism, Buddhism, Yoga, and other South Asian spiritual traditions, ostensibly derived from a lost Atlantean civilization, into German cultural and religious life.⁸⁸

Inspired by Rahn, Wiligut, and Wüst, Himmler recruited Gaston de Mengel, one of Rahn's esoteric colleagues, to instruct them on the links between pre-Christian Indian, Persian and Chinese literature and the Edda, Vedas, and Kabbalah. Impressed by de Mengel, Wiligut urged Rahn to translate Mengel's work on Agartha and Shambhala into German.⁸⁹ Wiligut then forwarded the translations of De Mengel's work to the SS-Obersturmführer Frenzolf Schmid, who used them to prove the existence of an 'Atlantean-Aryan' world triangle or geomantic 'axis' that connected the Nordic countries with France, South Asia and Tibet.⁹⁰ Alongside Schmid, Wiligut's protégé Günther Kirchhoff argued in turn that the geomantic points of Urga (Ulan Bator) and Lhasa were the 'two important Lama-centers,' with Ulan Bator as the 'Mongol Church.'⁹¹ Similarly, the *Abnenerbe*-affiliated völkisch-paganist, Friedrich Hielscher, argued that there was an organic, potentially Atlantean-relationship between the Vedas and Bhagavadgita and German mythology.⁹²

Based on this 'research', Himmler became convinced that 'in the mountains of Tibet an advanced civilization had once existed, possibly by

⁸⁶ W. Wüst, *Indo-germanische Bekenntnis* (Berlin 1943) 46-50.

⁸⁷ W. Wüst, *Japan und Wir* (Berlin 1942) 3-29.

⁸⁸ W. Wüst, *Indogermanische Bekenntnis* (Berlin 1941) 29-39, 86-87, 103.

⁸⁹ Memo by Wiligut, 1.13.37, letter to Wiligut (Weisthor), 3.09.37, in BAB: NS 19 3974; Kaufmann, *Tibet*, 124-126; Wegener, *Himmler*, 78-81.

⁹⁰ Memo by Weisthor, 3.09.37, Memo by Weisthor, 4.23.37 in BAB: NS 19 3974; Letter by Frenzolf Schmid, 3.21.37 in: BAB: NS 19/3974, 10. F. Schmid, *Urtexte der Ersten-Goettlichen-Offenbarung: Attalantische Ur-Bibel. Das Goldene Buch der Menschheit, Mit den ersten Offenbarungen aus der Paradieseszeit zurückreichend auf 85000 Jahre vor Christi geburt. Nach attalantische Überlieferungen und altindischen Aufzeichnungen aus den Urtexten wiederhergestellt* (1931); Frenzolf Schmid to RSK, 8.12.35, RSK, 4.27.40; 5.04.40, on *Last Ramadan*, 5.04.40, in BAB: R 9361-V/10777; Kaufmann, *Tibet*, 172-174.

⁹¹ Trimondi, *Hitler*, 110-111.

⁹² Trimondi, *Hitler*, 67-68.

the product of an original, sophisticated race that had sought refuge there from a global catastrophe.’ The civilization in question, according to Himmler, ‘must have been connected to the legend of Atlantis, and that the stranded ruling class of Atlantis had spread out from there to Europe and East Asia.’⁹³ Himmler subsequently confided to Schäfer, leader of the Tibet expedition, ‘that the Nordic race did not evolve, but came directly down from heaven to settle on the Atlantic continent.’⁹⁴ World Ice Theory further reinforced Himmler’s belief that Tibet may have been the last refuge of the Aryans who fled Atlantis after the great flood caused by blocks of ice hitting the earth.⁹⁵

Himmler and his SS associates therefore conceived the Tibet expedition as a way of confirming Rahn and Günther’s theses about an Ur-Nordic (Atlantean) race that peopled Central Asia and Tibet, bringing with it the remnants of an Indo-Aryan Irminist theology.⁹⁶ Himmler’s expectations for the expedition were ambitious. In addition to conducting geological research to confirm World Ice Theory and other border scientific theories, Schäfer’s team was to collect archaeological and anthropological evidence of Tibet being the mystic refuge of the Aryans. So keen was Himmler on proving these theories that he insisted that Schäfer consult the völkisch-esotericist Wiligut – who had no academic training in South Asian history or religion – before departing. And yet, Schäfer became convinced that Wiligut was reading his mind during their meeting, employing the

⁹³ Longerich, *Himmler*, 280-281; Pringle, *Plan*, 150.

⁹⁴ Himmler also mentioned positively General Hiroshi ‘Oshima’s belief in a similar theory concerning the origin of the noble castes in Japan’, which Oshima had personally explained to Hitler as well. Pringle, *Plan*, 150; C. Otto, *Hitler’s Japanese Confidant* (Lawrence, KS 1993); *Trial of Major German War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal 2* (Nüremberg 1947) 135: Oshima and Himmler, 31 January 1939. Himmler believed ‘he could penetrate directly to the world of the Germanic ancestors’ and ‘be reincarnated’, which provided the basis for ‘a real substitute religion (...) interwoven with notions of a primitive Germanic religion.’ Longerich, *Himmler*, 285; K. Vondung, ‘Von der völkischen Religiosität zur politischen Religion des Nationalsozialismus: Kontinuität oder neue Qualität?’ in: U. Puschner and C. Vollnhals ed., *Die völkisch-religiöse Bewegung im Nationalsozialismus. Eine Beziehungs- und Konfliktgeschichte* (Göttingen 2012) 29-30.

⁹⁵ Kaufmann, *Tibet*, 173-174, 348-349; Longerich, *Himmler*, 281-282.

⁹⁶ Kater, *Ahenenerbe*, 51-53; Longerich, *Himmler*, 280-282; R. Greve, ‘Tibetforschung im SS Ahnenenerbe’ in: T. Hauschild, *Lebenslust durch Fremdenfurcht* (Frankfurt am Main 1995) 168-209; Glowka, *Okkultgruppen*, 111-115.

‘telemetry’ associated with Tibetan lamas. While refusing to take along the Atlantomaniac novelist Edmund Kiss, Schäfer did agree to bring Bruno Beger, a student of H. K. Günther’s, who later conducted border scientific experiments on humans for the SS, as well as the young geologist Karl Wienert, who studied geomancy, laid lines, and occult theories about Tibet before departing.⁹⁷ Referring to the expedition as a ‘meeting between western and eastern swastika,’ Schäfer observed that:

The Tibetans, for whom the old Indo-Aryan symbol of the swastika is the highest symbol of happiness (...) have caused us no difficulties (...) we opened during our two month visit in the Tibetan capital the secret chambers of the Tibetan palaces and temples, not to mention the Tibetan ‘Volksseele’.⁹⁸

Then he arrived in Tibet, he would make a point of celebrating the pagan ‘Yule fest’ on the ‘roof of the world’ during the winter solstice. And on another occasion he offered pagan prayers to celebrate 9 November 1923 martyrs.⁹⁹ Beger collected stories from the ancient Tibetan epic, the *Gesar*, depictions of its Tibetan gods, and copies of ‘Tibetan astrological tables and calendars’ including ‘detailed information on the old holy places of the ancient shamanistic religion of Tibet, known as the Bon.’¹⁰⁰

After meeting the Tibetan leader Pinpoches, who ostensibly sat on a ‘swastika throne’, Schäfer suggested he was a supernatural figure akin to Hitler and compared the swastika to the Norse ‘thunderbolt.’¹⁰¹ Schäfer further argued that the lamas had access to a ‘magical mystical world’ and ‘were privy to an esoteric Ur-knowledge’, such as reading minds, that could be mastered by the SS.¹⁰² Lastly, Schäfer and Beger studied the magical rites that Tibetans used to honor the dead and the macabre place of death and rebirth, terror, and the death’s head in their religion, suggesting parallels to Luciferianism and Irminism.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Pringle, *Plan*, 150-152; Kater, *Ahenenerbe*, 51-52; I. Engelhardt, ‘Nazis of Tibet: A Twentieth Century Myth?’ in: M. Esposito ed., *Images of Tibet in the 19th and 20th Centuries* 22 (2008); K. Hite, *Nazij Occult* (Oxford 2013) 44.

⁹⁸ Trimondi, *Hitler*, 130.

⁹⁹ Trimondi, *Hitler*, 127.

¹⁰⁰ Pringle, *Plan*, 173.

¹⁰¹ Trimondi, *Hitler*, 128; Pringle, *Plan*, 171.

¹⁰² Trimondi, *Hitler*, 143-144.

¹⁰³ Trimondi, *Hitler*, 150-155.

Upon returning to Germany, Schäfer's expedition provided a windfall of material for Nazi esotericists, orientalists, and rune occultists who believed that Tibetan priests had preserved an Aryan Ur-religion for millennia.¹⁰⁴ This material found its way into an updated addition of Schäfer's 1933 popular book, *Mountains, Buddhas, and Bears*, as well as a new book on the New Year's celebration in Lhasa.¹⁰⁵ In order to impress the public with these religious-racial ideas, Schäfer produced a live action documentary titled *Secret Tibet*, the culmination in a series of so-called Himalayan films celebrating Tibetan religion and the 'triumph of the will' in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy.¹⁰⁶ In the wake of the Tibet expedition, Himmler and Wüst even opened a Tibetan Institute for Central Asian Research, appointing Schäfer as Director.¹⁰⁷ Finally Schäfer took the occasion of the movie's premiere to present personal gift to 'his Majesty Herr Hitler (...) a piece of clothing from the last Dalai Lama.'¹⁰⁸

Even as the Third Reich collapsed, the myth of Atlantis remained, influencing Nazi conceptions of death and rebirth. During the last years of the war many Nazis, along with millions of Germans, sought analogies 'linking what was happening to a natural catastrophe or a biblical end times.'¹⁰⁹ Along with the bible, Wagner and the Edda, the myth of Atlantis helped prepare the Nazis for 'violent floods, earthquakes and ice ages.'¹¹⁰ The great Aryan civilization of Atlantis (Thule) had collapsed in a global cataclysm thousands of years earlier. Now, so too would the 'thousand year Reich.'

Not every Nazi was preoccupied by occult, religious or border scientific theories centered on the theory of recovering a lost Aryan civilization. Not every Nazi, much less German, had one foot in Atlantis and one in Tibet. But if this brief survey has shown anything it is that the

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem, 137-140.

¹⁰⁵ Schäfer to Brandt, 6.25.40, 3-6 in: BAB: N 19/2709.

¹⁰⁶ K. Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement. German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire* (Harvard 2014) 244, 261, 266-267.

¹⁰⁷ The Ahnenerbe had a Tibet Institut (Tibet Institute), which was renamed the Sven Hedin Institut für Innerasien und Expeditionen (Sven Hedin Institute for Inner Asia and Expeditions) in 1943.

¹⁰⁸ Schäfer to Brandt, 6.25.40, 3-6, 16 in: BAB: N19/2709; Berzin, 'Shambhala'. [Http://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/history-culture/shambhala/the-nazi-connection-with-shambhala-and-tibet](http://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/history-culture/shambhala/the-nazi-connection-with-shambhala-and-tibet), accessed 20 December 2016.

¹⁰⁹ Black, *Death*, 275.

¹¹⁰ Halter, 'Hanns Hörbigers Welteislehre'.

usual suspects, such as Hess and Himmler, were not alone in their desire to restore 'a de-Christianized, Germanic environment, which with the help of the myths of Atlantis and Tibet was to be linked to long-lost examples of sophisticated cultures and via the Cosmic Ice Theory/astrology/astronomy to the history of the cosmos.'¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Longerich, *Himmler*, 285.