

## Themenschwerpunkt:

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### Bilder des Nordens in der Populärkultur

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## Otto Höfler's *Männerbund* Theory and Popular Representations of the North

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### Abstract

Otto Höfler's research on *Männerbünde* (men's bands or men's societies) has stimulated critical scholarly discussion on not only the existence of Germanic *Männerbünde* but also the concept of cultural continuity, the relationship between ritual and myth and historical representations of masculinity. Höfler's research has also found resonance, though, in facets of modern popular culture. This article explores how and why Otto Höfler's *Männerbund* theory has shaped and continues to shape conceptions of Old Norse literature and history in modern popular culture and identifies select examples of the adoption and use of his research.

### Zusammenfassung

Otto Höflers Recherche zu den germanischen Geheimbünden hat in der Wissenschaft Diskussion nicht nur über die Existenz germanischer Männerbünde provoziert, sondern auch über verwandte Themen wie kulturelle Kontinuität, das Verhältnis von Ritual und Mythen sowie historische Darstellungen von Männlichkeit. Höflers Forschung hat jedoch auch außerhalb des wissenschaftlichen Diskurses in die Facetten der modernen Populärkultur Einzug gefunden. Dieser Artikel untersucht, wie und warum die Männerbund-Theorie Otto Höflers Darstellungen der altnordischen Literatur und Geschichte in der modernen Populärkultur prägt und legt ausgewählte Beispiele für die Übernahme und Verwendung seiner Forschung fest.

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## I. Introduction

During the nationalist, *völkisch* movement in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Germany, literature and cultural studies became intertwined with politics and popular ideological movements. Politicians and even various scholars considered ancient »Germanic culture«,<sup>1</sup> including Old Norse literature, to be an instrument that could unite their people and their nation. Consequently, ideologically construed interpretations of ancient and medieval texts emerged and reached a wider audience, blurring the line between academic research, ideology and popular image.<sup>2</sup> However, this problematic relationship between academia, politics and popular culture is not a by-gone issue. Due to rapid globalisation and increased access to and exchange of knowledge via the Internet, political parties and social and religious groups can manipulate, (re-)construct and disseminate specific representations of the past for their own agendas more easily and effectively than ever. The characterisation of ancient Germanic peoples, or *Germanenbild*, of the Germanist, folklorist and Scandinavist Otto Höfler (1901-1987) is an example of this entanglement of academia, ideology and popular culture in the past and in the present. During Höfler's career, elements of his research resonated with political groups such as the SS *Ahnenerbe* (Ancestral Heritage Institute), but various facets of modern popular culture have adopted aspects of his theories in their conceptions and reconstructions of the past as well. Although several topics in his research corpus are worthy of discussion,<sup>3</sup> this article focuses on Höfler's *Männerbund* theory, which in some respects represents a concept of Old Norse-Scandinavian (and Germanic) culture itself, and its influence on specifically modern popular understanding of Old Norse-Scandinavian culture. Studies that have already touched on the influence of Höfler's research outside of academia will be expanded upon with further examples, which are by no means exhaustive.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, this article will explore why and how his research has been (and still could be) influential with modern popular cultural movements and even political groups. The nature of the subject matter of Höfler's research and

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this article, »Germanic« refers to the scholarly understanding of the term in the field of *Germanische Altertumskunde* (Germanic antiquity) at the time of Höfler's career, in other words, that which describes the cultural and social traditions of all Germanic-language-speaking nations. However, the use of this term outside of a historical linguistic context is highly problematic, and »Germanic« is defined and employed differently in cultural, philological, ethnological and archaeological studies. No clear method of use is agreed upon. As Höfler (as well as fellow Germanists in his day) argued for the existence of a shared »Germanic culture«, encompassing all Germanic-language-speaking countries and their traditions, the term will be used in this article, while acknowledging the disputatious nature of its use. For detailed discussion, see in particular Beck 1986b; Beck et al. 2004; Wiwjorra 2006, pp. 54–65; Zernack 2018.

<sup>2</sup> For discussion of the relationship between the nationalist, *völkisch* movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and German and Scandinavian studies, see in particular Dusse 2009, pp. 233–239; Engster 1986, pp. 47–56, 69–93; Puschner 2001, pp. 92–99; 2004; von See 1970, pp. 23–30; 1983, pp. 13–26; Wiwjorra 2006, pp. 197–245.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Höfler's research on Siegfried and Arminius is found in modern popular discourse, as is illustrated in an issue of the popular German magazine *Der Spiegel* from 2005. The article »Die Spur des Drachen« by Matthias Schulz summarises the theory that Arminius, leader of the Germanic Cherusci tribe, is the historical representation of the saga hero and dragon slayer Siegfried, an idea that Höfler discussed in the 1970s: see for example *Siegfried, Arminius und der Nibelungenhort* from 1978.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed analysis of the direct and indirect influence of Höfler's *Männerbund* theory in neo-pagan religious movements, see von Schnurbein 2016, pp. 235–243; 275–297. The adoption of Höfler's *Germanenbild* in aspects of the black metal movement is explored in Heesch 2011, see in particular pp. 344–356.

the underlying ideology of his work are key to understanding this issue. Höfler's research has already been the subject of considerable discussion in regard to its ideological context and his relationship with the National Socialist movement;<sup>5</sup> however, as these points are critical to understanding the influence of his research outside of an academic context, it is necessary to explore these aspects of his *Männerbund* theory further. This article will hopefully encourage further discussion – and not just with respect to Otto Höfler – on the adoption and even instrumentalisation of research on Old Norse-Germanic culture from this era in modern popular culture.

### II. Otto Höfler: A Biographical Sketch

Otto Höfler, born in 1901, studied German literature, history and culture at the University of Vienna. A student of the Germanist Rudolf Much, he was part of the »Much-Schule« or »Männerbundschole«,<sup>6</sup> whose members' research asserted the idea of cultural continuity and the interdisciplinary application of folklore studies, history and philology.<sup>7</sup> After completing his dissertation on German loanwords in Old West Norse and Old Swedish (»Über das Genus der deutschen Lehnwörter im Altwestnordischen und Altschwedischen«) in 1926, Höfler taught in Uppsala, Kiel, Munich and Vienna. His publication list reflects his interest in a wide range of historical and philological topics, from cultural morphology and the development of medieval drama to heroic sagas, sacred kingship and, of course, one of the most criticised of his theories, the existence of Germanic *Männerbünde* or *Geheimbünde* – (secret) men's bands.<sup>8</sup> Höfler's main work on the topic was his professorial thesis *Totenheer – Kultbund – Fastnachtsspiel*, published as the first volume of *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen (KGG)* in 1934.<sup>9</sup> His research caught the attention of several influential individuals of the National Socialist movement, such as Walther Wüst, dean at the University of Munich and curator of the National Socialist ancestral heritage institute,

<sup>5</sup> For analyses of the ideological aspects and political viability of Otto Höfler's *Männerbund* theory during the Third Reich see Gajek 2005; Schmid 2002; von Schnurbein 1990; von See 1970, in particular pp. 85–105; 1994, pp. 319–342; Zernack 1997, pp. 155–158; 2005; Zimmermann 1994; 1995, pp. 201–221.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Bockhorn 1994a, p. 139; 1994b, p. 481.

<sup>7</sup> For further information on the *Much-Schule*, folklore studies and *Germanische Altertumskunde* in Vienna during the first half of the twentieth century, in particular the discourse between the »ritualists« and »mythologists«, see Bockhorn 1987; 1994a; 1994b; Weber-Kellermann 1969, pp. 71–83.

<sup>8</sup> Researchers have translated *Männerbund* as »men's union«, »men's association« or »men's club«, or they have chosen not to translate the term because of its origin and establishment in German scholarship. In general, the German *Männerbund* can refer to a wide variety of historical and modern social groups. Researchers have therefore called for more concrete definition(s) of the term; see for example Heizmann 2003, pp. 130f. Höfler also uses the term *Geheimbünde* (secret men's bands or sacred men's bands, my translation) interchangeably with *Männerbünde* (men's bands, my translation). Henceforth in this article, the German term *Männerbund* will be used to refer to general research on the topic, but the English translations »sacred men's band« (reflecting the religious significance Höfler gives to the bands) and »men's band« refer specifically to Höfler's concept of *Geheimbund* and *Männerbund* in Germanic culture as presented in his research.

<sup>9</sup> The second volume (containing the second and third parts) of *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen (Cultic Secret Men's Bands of the Germanic Peoples)* was never published. However, Höfler did complete his research for the volume and wrote various (incomplete) drafts. His manuscripts and typescripts can be viewed upon request in the *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek* (Austrian National Library); see for example Sign.: Cod. Ser.n.44.968/1–2. Henceforward, *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen* will be abbreviated as *KGG*.

the SS *Ahnenerbe*, at the time. It was a result of Wüst's encouragement that Höfler was promoted to his position at the university in Kiel in 1934, and later, due to the intervention of Heinrich Himmler, to professor of German philology in Munich in 1938.<sup>10</sup>

Höfler's relationship with the National Socialist movement began as early as 1922 in Vienna, where he joined the *Ordnertruppe O.T.* – a group that would eventually form part of the SA (*Sturmabteilung*).<sup>11</sup> He became an official member of the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party) in 1936, and although his research resonated with its high-ranking leaders, Höfler never officially joined the SS (*Schutzstaffel*). However, he did work for the SS *Ahnenerbe* in some capacity as early as 1935 and was an active member of the *NS-Dozentenbund* (National Socialist Lecturers' League) from 1941–1945 and the *Reichsinstitut für Geschichte des neuen Deutschlands* (Reich Institute for History of the New Germany), even serving as president of the *Deutsches Wissenschaftliches Institut* (German Academic Institute) in Copenhagen from 1943–1945.<sup>12</sup> His research on the Germanic men's bands also influenced other researchers associated with the SS *Ahnenerbe*, as will be discussed below. Hence, Höfler sympathised with the National Socialist movement and was involved in the implementation of its agenda in the academic world. After the end of the Second World War, Höfler, who had been removed from his position in Munich in 1945, was declared only a *Mitläufer* (follower) of National Socialism, allowing for his reemployment at the university in 1954 in a related field of study as professor for *Nordische Philologie und Germanische Altertumskunde* (Nordic philology and Germanic antiquity).<sup>13</sup> In 1957, he was promoted to the chair of German philology in Vienna, where he remained until his retirement in 1971.

As discussed above, Otto Höfler's academic career was intertwined with the interests of the National Socialist regime. Likewise, several of his theories are aligned with the main sentiments of this political movement, most notably his research on the Germanic men's bands and his Germanic continuity theory.<sup>14</sup> However, the ideological underpinnings in Höfler's research (as well as the research of other Germanists at the time) reflect a general development of nationalistic and *völkisch* views of history and society that moulded much of Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As will be discussed in the following, it is in part the ideological

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<sup>10</sup> For detailed information on Höfler's relationship with Walther Wüst, the SS *Ahnenerbe* and the intervention of National Socialist officials in Höfler's career to his benefit, see in particular Birkhan 1988, p. 400; 1992, p. XI; Gajek 2005, p. 186; Schmid 2002, pp. 50–52.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. UAM E-II-1753 PA Höfler, Lebenslauf, 15.3.1937. See also Gajek 2005, p. 329.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Schreiber 2008, pp. 121–123. For further discussion on the relationship between Höfler's involvement in the National Socialist movement and his research, see note 5 above. See also Höfler 1940a, an article in which Höfler expresses his anti-Semitic views explicitly.

<sup>13</sup> Höfler was technically given permission to teach again as early as October 1950. For a detailed discussion of the circumstances of Höfler's reemployment at the Ludwig-Maximilian-University after the Second World War, see Schmid 2002, pp. 81–91; Zernack 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Gajek 2005, in particular pp. 339–343; Schmid 2002, pp. 47–50; von See 1994, pp. 330–342. Indeed, as other scholars have already pointed out, Höfler's characterisation of the Germanic men's bands was not positively received by all factions of the NSDAP, but was adopted in particular by the SS, which sought historical justification for its rituals and activities. See for example Hasenfratz 1982, p. 162f, Weißmann 2004, p. 53–60.

undertones of his research that have led to its influence in certain popular contexts. First it is necessary to examine the main arguments of Höfler's research before taking a closer look at its ideological context and at concrete examples of its influence on modern popular culture.

### III. Overview & Analysis of Otto Höfler's *Männerbund* Theory

Höfler's initial research on ancient Germanic *Männerbünde* is found in the aforementioned first volume of *KGG*. His thesis claims that secret warrior bands, composed of young men who had undergone religious-ecstatic initiation rites, existed in primitive Germanic culture. These bands, he argues, represented the core of Germanic culture and were responsible for the political, state-building force of the Germanic peoples or »Nordic race«, or as Höfler states: »The particular ability of the Nordic race, its state-forming power, found its place in the men's cult bands and drove them to the most productive development. They grew into powers that carried force and impact and entered into world history fighting, forming and ruling.«<sup>15</sup> For Höfler, the men's band, an exclusive social unit in ancient Germanic society, encapsulates the heart of the Germanic peoples, their history and culture – this is the main idea underlying his general characterisation of the Germanic peoples. Furthermore, he argues that these bands continued to exist throughout the Middle Ages in organisations such as guilds and in folk rituals surrounding carnival and the midwinter nights that have survived into modern European folk tradition. Additionally, Höfler interpreted common medieval narratives such as the legend of the Furious Host as literary reflections of the continued existence of ritual men's bands. Thus, Höfler outlines a general continuity of Germanic culture stretching from Tacitus's time to the modern era, based on the premise that much of myth, legend and folk ritual is, at its core, a reflection of ancient cult practice.<sup>16</sup>

Many of Höfler's arguments in *KGG* are based on the work of Elisabeth (Lily) Weiser-Aall, who first argued for the existence of ancient Germanic warrior cults and their initiation rites in her professorial thesis from 1927.<sup>17</sup> Other individuals from the *Much-Schule*, including Robert Stumpf and Richard Wolfram, also argued that ancient cult rites were at the root of many folk customs as well as the mythic narratives and sagas of the Middle Ages.<sup>18</sup> Höfler's *Männerbund* theory and the works of these individuals were strongly affected by research on *Männerbünde* in the fields of ethnology and religious studies at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> Heinrich Schurtz, who outlined the role of *Männerbünde* in primitive societies in Africa, North America and

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<sup>15</sup> »Die eigenste Begabung der nordischen Rasse, ihre staatenbildende Kraft, fand in den Männerbünden ihre Stätte und hat sie zu reichster Entfaltung getrieben. Sie sind zu Mächten emporgewachsen, die Tragkraft und Stoßkraft besaßen und kämpfend, gestaltend und herrschend in die Weltgeschichte eingegangen sind.« (Höfler 1934, p. 357).

<sup>16</sup> See the discussion of Germanic cultural continuity in Höfler 1938.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Weiser 1927.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Wolfram 1936–1938, with reference to research of other *Much-Schule* members, I, p. 4; Stumpf 1934, p. 289; Weiser 1927, for example in her introduction pp. 7–11, as well as her subsequent arguments. See also note 7 above on the *Much-Schule*.

<sup>19</sup> For detailed analysis of *Männerbünde* in literature and popular society at the turn of the twentieth century and beyond, see for example Bruns 2008; Reulecke 2001, in particular pp. 35–46; Zilles 2018, pp. 47–154; and in regard to academic discourse on *Männerbünde*: Brunotte 2004; von Schnurbein 2016, pp. 232–243; von See 1994, pp. 319–342.

Polynesia, was a major source of scholarly inspiration. The main argument of Schurtz's research concerns the significance of the *Männerbund*, next only to the family unit, as a sociological form.<sup>20</sup> His study popularised the topic in academic circles, but it was a student of his, Hans Blüher (1888–1955), who launched discussion on *Männerbünde* into the realm of popular discourse during the *Wandervogel* movement and underlined the role of homoerotic, subliminal sexuality in the *Männerbund*.<sup>21</sup> As the Germanist and Scandinavist Klaus von See has discussed, the development of and research on *Männerbünde* was highly relevant to the political and social climate in Germany in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> Especially in the context of the Youth Movement and through the influence of *völkisch* thinkers, the popularity of secret societies or men's clubs and interest in their possible origins in the cult rituals of ancient tribes greatly increased and was used as a political instrument.<sup>23</sup>

Also influential for Höfler's research was the founder of the German Faith Movement, Jakob Wilhelm Hauer (1881–1962). Hauer examined the basis and development of secret societies in various ethnic groups from a religious-historical perspective in his study *Die Religionen. Ihr Werden, ihr Sinn, ihre Wahrheit*.<sup>24</sup> According to Hauer, at the centre of all religion was a religious-ecstatic experience that could awaken the individual to another state of being, to an »otherworld of a completely different kind from the earthly or every day.«<sup>25</sup> This general concept of a religious-ecstatic phenomenon influenced Höfler's understanding of the Germanic men's band as a sacred, religious death cult, predicated upon a similar phenomenon of ecstasy in which the »limits of the individual« are discarded and allow one to enter into the »supraindividual collective of the band with the dead – with »its« dead.«<sup>26</sup> Höfler suggests the paramount role of this process when he describes it, and the existence of the men's bands in general, as embodying the »foundations of Germanic communal life.«<sup>27</sup> The transformational experience of the members of the cult band into warriors through ritual mumming is a further significant element of Höfler's research that he describes as an irrational phenomenon of religious »Dämonie« (demonical possession); hence his reference to the Germanic men's bands as »demonic bands«, »demonic transformative cults« or »bearers of the demonic.«<sup>28</sup> The demonic and ecstatic elements described in *KGG* point to the influence of the ethnological and religious historical studies discussed above and Höfler's belief in the bands' religious, irrational nature. Further, it

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Schurtz 1902, pp. 347–348.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Blüher 1962. For discussion on Blüher's concept of *Männerbund*, see Bruns 2008; von See 1994, pp. 321ff.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. von See 1994, pp. 321ff.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> The title in English may be translated as: *Religions. Their Genesis, their Meaning, their Truth*. For a detailed study on Jakob Wilhelm Hauer and the *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*, (German Faith Movement) see Baumann 2005.

<sup>25</sup> »Überwelt ganz anderer Art gegenüber der irdischen oder alltäglichen.« (Hauer 1923, p. 93).

<sup>26</sup> »die überindividuelle Gemeinschaft des Bundes mit den Toten – mit »seinen« Toten.« (Höfler 1934, p. IX).

<sup>27</sup> »Grundfesten des germanischen Gemeinschaftslebens.« (*Ibid.*, p. 1).

<sup>28</sup> »Dämonische Bünde«, »dämonische Verwandlungskulte«, »Träger des Dämonischen« (*Ibid.*, p. 17, 14). For a short analysis on the concept of *Dämonie* in *KGG* in regard to his comments on medieval witch-cults see Leszczynska 2009, pp. 311–318 and for Höfler's own explanation of the term, see Höfler 1934, pp. IX–X.



is this irrational religious-cultic state of the demonic and the ecstatic in the men's band that Höfler argues has continued to exist from Tacitus's era into modernity in various traditions and organisations. Höfler writes:

This Old Germanic form of community did not perish with antiquity. Until now we have shown especially in regard to the history of religion that such cults have lived on through all the centuries. Yet what has always fulfilled and lived on in these religious forms was social demonism. And this demonic possession has become a history-making force.<sup>29</sup>

This concept of *Dämonie* and the ecstatic experience are key to Höfler's interpretation of the historical, literary, folkloristic and archaeological sources examined in *KGG*.

Höfler uses a wide range of sources in his *Männerbund* theory, but the focus of *KGG* is the motif of the Wild Hunt or Furious Host (also Wild Army). Traditional to medieval and early-modern Scandinavia, Germany and England, these legends portray a supernatural group of warriors or hunters who flew wildly through the night during the twelve nights between Christmas and Epiphany. The origin of these legends has been considered to be rooted in a form of nature mythology; that is, these wild riders personify the howling of storms and the fear felt before the clash of thunder and lightning.<sup>30</sup> Höfler, however, interprets these raucous, wild riders, which in many instances are portrayed as armies of death, as narrative characterisations of actual demonic cult bands.<sup>31</sup> In addition, by examining different aspects including the time of year of their occurrence, characteristics of mumming in the accounts and related motifs such as the cult wagon, Höfler connects the Wild Hunt and Furious Host legends to early modern masked processions, including carnival festivities and the *Perchtenläufe* (*Perchten* processions) of the alpine regions around the time of Advent.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, building on the research of Weiser-Aall, Höfler argues that the legends of the Wild Hunt and Furious Host and folk customs such as the *Perchtenläufe* are, at their root, later embodiments of the rituals and initiation rites of the supposed ancient Germanic warrior bands described in Tacitus's *Germania*. In particular, Höfler and Weiser focus on the characteristics of the Harii as well as the Chatti, which Tacitus personifies as phantom warriors known for their wild battle cries and painted bodies.<sup>33</sup> In the case of the Chatti, the long hair of the young male warriors

<sup>29</sup> »Diese altgermanische Gemeinschaftsform ist nicht mit der Vorzeit zugrunde gegangen. Wir haben bisher vor allem religionshistorisch gezeigt, daß solche Kulte durch alle Jahrhunderte fortgelebt haben. Was aber jene Religionsformen von jeher erfüllt hat und in ihnen fortgelebt hat, war soziale Dämonie. Und diese Dämonie ist zur geschichtsbildenden Kraft geworden.« (Höfler 1934, p. 341).

<sup>30</sup> For research on the Wild Hunt and Furious Host legends, see for example de Vries 1970, I, pp. 449–455; Lecouteux 2011, in particular pp. 204–208 in relation to Höfler's research, and pp. 186–192, 223–235 for further evidence on the attestation of the Wild Hunt or Wild Army/Furious Host in connection with Odin/Wodan in Scandinavian literature and folk tradition in particular.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Höfler 1934, pp. 1–15; 1936.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Höfler 1934, pp. 8–13. The idea that this folk legend stems from ancient cult practice was not originally Höfler's idea, but had already been suggested by the folklorist Karl Meuli, Lily Weiser as well as by Richard Hünnerkopf. Indeed, Höfler appears to have adopted and expanded the main argument underlying Meuli's article: that ancient cult ritual is the source of a great deal of legends and folk custom from the Middle Ages and early modern period. See Meuli 1928, in particular pp. 23–29; Weiser 1927, pp. 31–43; Hünnerkopf 1926, pp. 20–23; see also Heizmann 2003, p. 126.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Weiser 1927, pp. 31–43; Höfler 1934, pp. 166–167, 198; Much, Jahnkuhn & Lange 1967, p. 431, 485.

would only be cut once the warrior had killed his enemy.<sup>34</sup> Höfler, Weiser and their mentor Rudolf Much consider these bands to represent death cults, seeing at their centre a type of obligation to worship the dead as well as a deep religious relationship between the warrior band and a world of the fallen, similar to the experiences of *Männerbünde* and *Geheimbünde* described in Schurtz's and Hauer's research.<sup>35</sup> Further, like Weiser and Much, Höfler argues the connection of the Germanic *Harri* to the Wild Hunt and Furious Host motifs through the etymological link between Latin *harii* and Middle High German *her* (*Heer*, i.e. army).<sup>36</sup>

The etymological connection between the Germanic *Harri* and the Old Norse *einherjar* is also key to Höfler's arguments. Odin's fallen warriors in Valhalla appear closely aligned to his perception of the Wild Hunt and Furious Host motifs as mythic personifications of Germanic men's bands, based on their attributes as religious-ecstatic death cults as well as the Middle High German attestation of the Wild Army and Furious Host as *Wuotes her* or *Wutanes her*, that is, *Wodan's* (Odin's) army.<sup>37</sup> Höfler argues that the motif of Odin as leader of the Furious Host and his role as leader of the *einherjar* in Old Norse mythology is evidence of the existence of Germanic men's bands and their narrative equivalents in both »high literature« and the »lower classes« of Germanic culture:

We must definitely view Óðin's death warriors, the *einherjar*, in connection with Wodan's death army. For if the thesis of this book is correct, that is, that the demonic (mimic) death cults and – with them – »the legends« of the Wild Army as well form a continuous vein that stretches from ancient times into ours, then it becomes an irrefutable call to compare the related figures of higher and high literature with the subject matter of the lower classes.<sup>38</sup>

Höfler uses Odin's attribution as god of fury and ecstasy in medieval literature and the occurrence of sacrifices related to the cult of Odin during the winter as a further argument that the *einherjar* and the Wild Hunt and Furious Host legends are narrative characterisations of actual ecstatic, demonic men's bands.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Tacitus 1988, pp. 94f.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Much, Jahnkuhn & Lange 1967, p. 485, 431; Höfler 1934, in particular pp. 247f.; Weiser 1927, p. 39.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Höfler 1934, pp. 3–10, 67, 166, 226; Weiser 1927, p. 40; Tacitus 1988, pp. 485f. According to Rudolf Much, the word *harii* is related to the gothic *harjis* »Heer« and is also found in several names for Odin and Wodan: *Herjann*, *Herfāðir*, *Herjaföðir*, which means »Herrscher« i.e. »Lord.« He interprets *einherjar* as »ausgezeichnete Krieger, Helden«, outstanding fighters and heroes, and not as single fighters, »Einzelkämpfer«: see Much 1917, p. 287.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Höfler 1934, pp. 77–84, 226. See also de Vries 1962, p. 43; 1970, I, p. 449; Simek 2006, »Wildes Heer«, p. 491.

<sup>38</sup> »Óðins Totenkrieger, die *Einherjar*, müssen wir ganz gewiß im Zusammenhang mit dem Totenheer Wodans sehen. Denn wenn die Behauptung dieses Buches richtig ist, daß die dämonischen (mimischen) Totenkulte und – mit ihnen – auch »Sagen« vom Wilden Heer eine ununterbrochenen Ader bilden, die aus uralter Zeit bis in die unserige reicht, so wird es zur unabweislichen Forderung, die zugehörigen Gestaltungen der höheren und hohen Literatur mit den Stoffen der Grundsichten zu vergleichen.« (Höfler 1934, p. 164)

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Höfler 1934, pp. 16–21, see also pp. 257–263 for Höfler's discussion of the *einherjar* as a death cult in relation to the ecstatic experiences of the sacred men's bands.

Likewise, Höfler argues that the Old Norse *berserkir* (berserkers)<sup>40</sup> are literary representations of ancient Germanic *Dämonenkrieger*: demonic cult warriors overtaken by battle fury, who worship a god of death or war.<sup>41</sup> *Berserkir*, who appear in the Old Norse sagas and skaldic poetry in pairs, groups of twelve or as single, erratic warriors, either challenged other men to one-on-one battles or functioned as a type of elite army.<sup>42</sup> According to Snorri Sturluson in *Ynglinga saga*, the *berserkir* are overcome by *berserksgangr*, a type of ecstatic-warrior state that endowed them with extraordinary fighting capabilities. Snorri's assertion that these warriors are connected to Odin is also key to Höfler's thesis.<sup>43</sup> Weiser-Aall first argued that the *berserkir* of Old Norse sagas could represent actual *Männerbünde*, and Höfler expands upon this idea in relating the *berserksgangr* to the ecstatic rites of his Odin-worshipping sacred men's bands.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Höfler connects *berserksgangr* to Odin through the god's own attribution as god of *Wut* (i.e. fury).<sup>45</sup> Scholars remain divided as to whether *berserkir* are indeed only a literary construct, or narrative representations of actual warrior bands in medieval Scandinavia, with both sides offering convincing arguments.<sup>46</sup> Höfler, though, maintained that *berserkir* were literary remnants of actual men's bands, drawing a parallel between bear- and wolfskin-clad warriors in medieval Scandinavia and the ancient Germanic tribes from Tacitus's *Germania*. Closely related to the *berserkir* in Old Norse literature are the *úlfhéðnar*, warriors clad in wolfskins who, according to Höfler, are also examples of Germanic *Dämonenkrieger*. Similarly, Höfler argues that the warriors Sigmund and Sinfjötli from *Völsunga saga*, who take the form of wolves, also represent Germanic »Weihekriegertum« and the cult of Odin.<sup>47</sup> In the same vein, the tale of Sigmund and Sinfjötli as wolf warriors mirrors the existence of actual men's warrior bands, who donned wolf-skins and »became« demonic warriors.<sup>48</sup>

As illustrated above, Höfler uses a diverse range of material in *KGG*, spanning from Tacitus's *Germania* to European folk traditions, to argue for the existence of Germanic sacred men's bands. In particular, Old Norse mythology and literature take a fundamental place in his research. Like many Germanists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he considered medieval Scandinavian culture to be part of a holistic Germanic tradition – a »gemeingermanisch« tradition.<sup>49</sup> The importance given to Old Norse sources within this field developed from

<sup>40</sup> For detailed discussion of the etymology and meaning of *berserkir*, pl. *berserkir*, see Dale 2014, pp. 60–71; Samson 2011, pp. 66–91.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Höfler 1934, pp. 67f., 197–199.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Simek 2006, »Berserker«, pp. 49–50; Höfler 1976, pp. 300–301. For recent studies on *berserkir* in Old Norse literature see Dale 2014 and Samson 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Sturluson 1911, *Ynglinga saga*, chapter 6.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Weiser 1927, pp. 47–82; Höfler 1934, pp. 197–199.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Höfler 1934, pp. 326–330 on Odin's attribute as god of fury and ecstasy.

<sup>46</sup> For example, von See 1981, pp. 311–317; see also Vincent Samson's thorough analysis of this subject in Samson 2011.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Höfler 1934, p. 197–203.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 200 on his interpretation of the narratives in *Völsunga saga* as initiation rituals. In *KGG*, Höfler provides his own lengthy interpretation of many narrative strands of the saga in relation to Germanic men's bands, initiation rights and the sacred-religious aspect of Germanic warrior life: see pp. 188–219.

<sup>49</sup> The Swiss Germanist Andreas Heusler in particular applied the concept of »gemeingermanisch« in his research, see Heusler 1934, pp. 79–88.

the reception of the Scandinavian Renaissance in Germany during the Romantic period, when developments in Indo-European philology and a greater interest in a national culture or »Volkskultur«, especially in German-speaking countries, led to this identification of Old Norse culture as a common source of »Germanic« heritage.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, the work of such scholars as Johann Gottfried Herder and Jakob Grimm, which identified German culture within a wider Germanic tradition, led to the publication of Old Norse material with the intention of highlighting such a shared tradition.<sup>51</sup> This interest in Old Norse-Scandinavian culture in Germany increased towards the end of the nineteenth century with the influence of Emperor Wilhelm II as one of Germany's greatest idealisers of Scandinavian or »Northern Germanic« culture.<sup>52</sup> Born out of this nationalist enthusiasm were various ethnographic studies on the »Germanic peoples«, such as the work of Graf Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882), who deemed Scandinavia to be the *vagina nationum* of the »Germanic race.«<sup>53</sup> This racist perspective of German-Scandinavian culture would remain influential into the next century.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Old Norse sagas, in particular the *Íslendingasögur* (sagas of Icelanders or family sagas), began to influence scholarly studies of German-Germanic philology and history in comparison to the mythological texts, i.e. the *Eddas*, which had already been translated into German in the previous century. This »literary paradigm change« is represented by such German saga translations as the *Sammlung Thule*, which increased scholarly as well as general public interest in Old Norse literature and mythology.<sup>54</sup> As Hermann Engster emphasises in his own analysis of this development in German-Germanic philology, the translation and publication of these sagas was precipitated in part by Arthur Bonus's (1864–1941) three-volume work *Isländerbuch*, published in 1907.<sup>55</sup> Bonus, an author and priest, wrote this ideologically and racially orientated analysis of medieval Icelandic culture with the support and contribution of the renowned Germanist Andreas Heusler (1865–1940) who, like Bonus, idealised the matter-of-fact, realistic style of the sagas of Icelanders and their protagonists as the paragon of Old Norse – but also wider Germanic – history and culture.<sup>56</sup>

Heusler was not the only Germanist who looked to the sagas of Icelanders to understand Germanic culture. The Danish historian and philologist Vilhelm Peter Grønbech (1873–1948) also considered the sagas of Icelanders to represent a wider Germanic tradition. Grønbech is known for his four-volume work *Vor Folkeæt i Oldtiden*, published between 1909 and 1912, which strongly influenced scholars such as Heusler and Höfler.<sup>57</sup> His main

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Duse 2009, pp. 233–239; Engster 1986, pp. 69–93; von See 1970, pp. 79–82; Wiwjorra 2006, pp. 197–245; Zernack 1997.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> For a discussion of the perception of Scandinavia during the Wilhelmine era, see for example Zernack 1996.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Gobineau 1935, p. 606. See also Mosse 1964, pp. 88–125; von See 1970, pp. 56–59.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Engster 1986, p. 71. For an in-depth analysis of the *Sammlung Thule* translations, their significance in the development of Scandinavian studies in Germany as well as their place in the wave of the German *völkisch* movement, see Zernack 1994.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Engster 1986, p. 71.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Bonus 1907, I; Heusler 1926; Heusler 1934.

<sup>57</sup> *Vor Folkeæt i Oldtiden* was translated into English in 1931 (*The Culture of the Teutons*) and German (*Kultur und Religion der Germanen*) in 1937. A new e-book edition of the Danish version was released on 1. January 2019 by the publishers Lindhardt og Ringhof, signalling the continued (or renewed) interest in this work. For a discussion of the reception of Grønbech's work by German-

objective in this study is to extract the essence of ancient Germanic culture by analysing specific themes and values of pagan religion and thereby create a unified representation of Germanic culture. The sagas of Icelanders feature heavily in this study. Hence, Grønbech's analysis of the significance of kin – the *slægt* – as the heart and soul of Germanic society arises demonstrably from a reliance on the characters and narratives from the sagas of Icelanders. Otto Höfler encouraged the translation of Grønbech's work into German, and he wrote a foreword to the German edition published in 1937.<sup>58</sup> He also wrote a critical review of *Vor Folkeæt i Oldtiden* titled »Ein Bild der gesamtgermanischen Kultur« in the same year, which was published in the journal of the SS *Ahnenerbe: Germanien. Monatshefte für Germanenkunde zur Erkenntnis deutschen Wesens*.<sup>59</sup> In this review, Höfler praises Grønbech's holistic research method that presents an all-encompassing picture of Germanic culture and unites the northern and southern »Germanic traditions.«<sup>60</sup> Höfler writes:

For us Germans, it is of particular significance that here a Nordic scholar has created an overall picture of the whole of Germanic history and at the same time remains completely free from the common error of playing off northern Germanic culture against southern Germanic culture and thus creating a gap between Germany and Scandinavia.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, the application and interpretation of the Old Norse *berserkir* and *úlfhéðnar* in a wider understanding of a German-Germanic tradition in *KGG* posed no methodological hurdle for Höfler. Consequently, in his reliance on select Old Norse sources, Höfler's *Männerbund* theory represents a construct of a wider Germanic tradition as well as of Old Norse history and culture – of the North. Therefore, it is unsurprising that his *Männerbund* theory has influenced the understanding of specific concepts from Old Norse-Scandinavian culture and has been attractive for popular cultural groups that consider Old Norse myth and culture within a wider framework of Germanic cultural tradition.

#### IV. Contextualisation and Ideological Underpinnings of Otto Höfler's *Männerbund* Theory

To better understand the impacts of Otto Höfler's research on popular conceptions of Old Norse culture and history, it is necessary to explore how his *Männerbund* theory, although embedded in the world of scholarship, also represents an ideological and especially *völkisch* construct of Germanic history and culture.

First, a few examples of the specifically *völkisch* tendencies of Höfler's research should be highlighted, that is, aspects of the populist, nationalist movement at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century

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speaking Germanists, see Beck 2004.

<sup>58</sup> Höfler's forward was featured up to and including the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of *Kultur und Religion der Germanen* from 1997, the inclusion of which, given Höfler's National Socialist sympathies, has been strongly criticised, see Behringer 1998.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Höfler 1937, the title in English may be translated as: »An Idea of Germanic Culture in Its Entirety«.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>61</sup> »Für uns deutsche ist es von besonderer Bedeutung, daß hier ein nordischer Gelehrter ein Gesamtbild des ganzen Germanentums entwirft und dabei gänzlich frei bleibt von dem häufigen Fehler, das Nordgermanentum gegen das Südgermanentum auszuspielen und damit zwischen Deutschland und Skandinavien eine Kluft aufzureizen.« (*Ibid.*, p. 195).

centred on the concept of the *Volk*.<sup>62</sup> For example, Höfler's focus on the *Lebenskraft* (life force) or spirit of the Germanic peoples as a historical, political force as well as his description of religious-ecstatic experience on the part of the men's bands as a source of this strength correspond to nationalistic sentiments within the *völkisch* movement.<sup>63</sup> The following quote from *KGG* particularly emphasises this point: »I see a centre of Germanic life, a source of religious, ethical and historic-political abilities of immense power in the highly remarkable heroic-demonic death-cult of men's societies that will be illuminated here.«<sup>64</sup> A similar ideological approach to his source material is observed in Höfler's interpretation of the Old Norse *einherjar* myth within the context of his *Männerbund* theory discussed above. Höfler writes the following in reference to the *einherjar*:

Apart from the release of the individual into the All and singular individual ecstasy, there is the phenomenon of the unity of the closed union – which thus becomes a mystic »higher« unity. And it is precisely this kind of ecstatic social unity that seems to me to be a force of unpredictable significance.<sup>65</sup>

Hence, Höfler interprets the Old Norse *einherjar* myth as both a plausible mythological representation of actual male cult bands in Germanic culture and, through the *einherjar*'s characteristic as a death cult, as evidence of the religious significance of the bands, emphasising the warriors' connection to their fallen comrades. Höfler's analysis of the *einherjar* illustrates how popular ideological sentiments, seen here in the realisation of the individual through connectedness to the group (i.e. through a religious-ecstatic experience), are embedded in his *Männerbund* theory.<sup>66</sup> Likewise, this concept of the individual as part of a »whole« strongly correlates with the individual's search for a connection with the cosmos – an existential journey outlined by *völkisch* writers such as Julius Langbehn and Paul de Lagarde.<sup>67</sup>

The *völkisch* movement in Germany was closely intertwined with the rise of National Socialism in the first half of the twentieth century, and it is thus unsurprising that factions of the NSDAP, in particular the SS *Ahnenerbe*, which was tasked with rediscovering and instrumentalising German-Germanic history, took an interest in Höfler's *Männerbund* theory.<sup>68</sup> However, although the NSDAP encouraged research on the ancient Germanic peoples, no

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<sup>62</sup> For detailed discussion of the *völkisch* movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, see for example Mosse 1964; Puschner, Schmitz & Ulbricht 1996; Puschner 2001. For further discussion of the *völkisch* underpinnings of Höfler's *Männerbund* theory, see Burrell 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Burrell 2020, pp. 99–101.

<sup>64</sup> »Ich sehe in dem höchst merkwürdigen heroisch-dämonischen Totenkult der Mannschaftsverbände, der hier freigelegt werden soll, einen Mittelpunkt des germanischen Lebens, eine Quelle religiöser, ethischer und historisch-politischer Kräfte von ungeheurer Macht.« (Höfler 1934, p. VIII).

<sup>65</sup> »Außer dem Aufgehen des Einzelnen im All und der vereinzelnden Individualekstase besteht also das Phänomen der Gepacktheit des geschlossenen Verbandes – der dadurch zur mystischen »höheren« Einheit wird. Und eben diese Art des ekstatischen sozialen Einheitserlebens scheint mir eine Kraft von völlig unabsehbarer Bedeutung.« (Ibid., p. 262 note 337).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Burrell 2020, pp. 101–104.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Mosse 1964, pp. 31–51. For a discussion of this concept in regard to German folklore studies in the twentieth century, see Weber-Kellermann 1969, pp. 46–54.

<sup>68</sup> Several in-depth analyses already illuminate the alignment of Höfler's concept of ancient Germanic culture with the ideals of the National Socialist regime. See for example: Gajek 2005; von See 1994, pp. 319–342; von Schnurbein 1990.



official historical image of them was propagated during the Third Reich.<sup>69</sup> Disagreements existed within the NSDAP itself as to how the ancient *Germane* should be depicted. Alfred Rosenberg, the chief ideologue of the NSDAP, considered the true Germanic hero to be a farmer, an image that was supported by the research of Bernhard Kummer. The opponents of this image were Heinrich Himmler and the SS *Ahnenerbe*, who argued for a strongly militant image of the Germans' ancient ancestors that gave ideological credence to the rituals and death cults of the SS.<sup>70</sup> As already mentioned, Himmler and other members of the *Ahnenerbe* were aware of Höfler's research and believed it supported their ideology.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, Höfler's theories were widespread in the context of the SS *Ahnenerbe* and other pseudo-academic organisations during the Third Reich. For example, Höfler's professorial thesis and his article on Germanic cultural continuity were reviewed with great enthusiasm in *Germanien*, the journal of the SS *Ahnenerbe*, and Höfler himself published a review in the journal in 1937.<sup>72</sup> Other articles that Höfler published in politicised research journals and volumes at the time include: »Gab es ein Einheitsbewusstsein der Germanen?« published in *Deutsche Kultur im Leben der Völker. Mitteilungen der Akademie zur wissenschaftlichen Erforschung und zur Pflege des Deutschtums* and »Germanische Einheit« published in the series *Von deutscher Art in Sprache und Dichtung*.<sup>73</sup> These articles reflect his sympathy for the National Socialist movement as well as highlight the nationalist ideology that underpins much of Höfler's research.

Moreover, *KGG* directly influenced other researchers associated with the SS *Ahnenerbe*. One example is the Indogermanist and linguist Richard von Kienle (1908-1985), who published his study *Germanische Gemeinschaftsformen* in 1939. Von Kienle argues that kin, tribe and (warrior) band (*Sippe*, *Stamm* and *Bund*) are the three main units of Germanic society, and his discussion of the *Bund* adopts Höfler's characterisation of Germanic men's bands as death cults, whereupon von Kienle specifically emphasises the role of the *Bund* in fighting enemy powers.<sup>74</sup> Another is the study *Germanengut im Zunftbrauch* by Rudolf Siemsen, which Höfler and the *Ahnenerbe-Stiftung Verlag* published posthumously in 1942. Höfler supervised Siemsen's research, which strongly reflects the direct influence of his *Männerbund* theory and concept of cultural continuity.<sup>75</sup> For instance, Siemsen expands upon Höfler's argument that both the customs and traditions of guilds and their social-political

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<sup>69</sup> Even Adolf Hitler had an ambivalent attitude towards research on Germanic culture and how it should be used or relayed to the public. See Mees 2004.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Ackermann 1970, pp. 53–71; von See 1994, pp. 332–340. For further discussion on the academic as well as political controversy surrounding Höfler's and Kummer's differing views of ancient Germanic culture, see Engster 1986, pp. 80–93; Leszczynska 2009, pp. 322–353 as well as Höfler's discussion of Kummer's dissertation in *KGG*: Höfler 1934, pp. 335–339, note 169. See also Kummer's response to Höfler and his *Germanenbild* in Kummer 1935a; 1935b; 1935c.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Gajek 2005, pp. 339–343; Hasenfratz 1982, p. 162; Schmid 2002, pp. 47–50; von Schnurbein 1990, pp. 101–102; For a detailed analysis of the ideology of the SS propagated by Heinrich Himmler, see Ackermann 1970, pp. 53–71.

<sup>72</sup> Both works are reviewed in journal issues from the years 1935 and 1938. For more discussion on *Germanien*, see Ackermann 1970, pp. 61ff.; Helmert-Corvey 1987. For Höfler's review in *Germanien*, see Höfler 1937.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Höfler 1940b, »Did the Germanic Peoples Possess a Consciousness of Unity?«; 1941, »Germanic Unity«.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. von Kienle 1939, p. 195, 198ff.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Siemsen 1942, pp. 11–12.

functions have their roots in the death cults of ancient Germanic tribes. Siemsen writes the following in reference to Höfler's men's bands:

These cults are closely intertwined with *communities*, in our case with worker's communities. They provide a strong community ethos to the unions that support them and hold the key to those forces in the first place that have become historically active through these communities. *Höfler* has shown that such cults have been carried on by military and political organisations. Craftsmen, too, are no exception in this respect.<sup>76</sup>

Here Siemsen also alludes to Höfler's research in the second volume of *KGG*, in which Höfler outlines the continuity of Germanic men's bands in medieval and modern social customs and organisations. This unpublished volume would likely have interested the SS *Ahnenerbe* since it affirms its belief in the historical-political *Lebenskraft* of the German people.<sup>77</sup>

The above examples illustrate that Höfler's ideas found relevance within the context of the pseudo-academic research supported by the National Socialist regime. However, previous research has yet to address the extent to which Höfler's *Männerbund* theory reached an even wider audience beyond the SS *Ahnenerbe* and NSDAP in influencing the popular image of the ancient Germanic peoples in the 1930s and 1940s. This particular issue will not be explored here, but does merit further investigation. Nevertheless, the *völkisch*, ideological elements of Höfler's *Männerbund* theory and the reception of his research during the Third Reich explain why his research has been and could continue to be of interest to popular cultural groups – but also right-wing political groups, as will be touched on briefly below – that harbour similar sentiments.

Furthermore, a closer examination of Höfler's general concept of historical and philological research highlights why his research has been influential outside of the academic world, and certain aspects of Höfler's *Männerbund* theory reflect his sometimes emotional and ideological research approach. An example thereof is his holistic interpretation of the god Odin.<sup>78</sup> At the end of the first volume of *KGG*, Höfler argues that Odin's somewhat inexplicable and complex nature in the wider Old Norse-Germanic tradition can be best explained if, in his truest form, Odin is considered to be the god of the ecstatic:

I believe that this very controversial figure can first be truly understood only when we see him as the god of ecstatic men's bands. As it seems to me, the many and seemingly contradictory sides of the image of this most famous god of the Germanic peoples become united as part of a whole, only then does the god become the gestalt.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> »Diese Kulte sind eng mit *Gemeinschaften*, in unserem Falle mit Berufsgemeinschaften, verwoben. Sie geben den sie tragenden Verbänden ein starkes Gemeinschaftsethos und enthalten überhaupt erst den Schlüssel für diejenigen Kräfte, die durch diese Gemeinschaften historisch wirksam geworden sind. *Höfler* hat gezeigt, daß solche Kulte von kriegerischen und politischen Verbänden getragen wurden. Auch die Handwerker bilden in dieser Beziehung keine Ausnahme.« (Siemsen 1942, pp. 23–24, original emphasis).

<sup>77</sup> A similar conclusion is reached in Weißmann 2004, pp. 56–57.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Burrell 2020, pp. 106–109.

<sup>79</sup> »Ich glaube, daß uns sein vielumstrittenes Wesen erst faßbar wird, wenn wir ihn als Gott der ekstatischen Männerbünde sehen. Da



This holistic concept is emphasised again in the following quote concerning Odin: »Where, then, did the muddling of this gestalt begin, and to what limits can a meaningful whole be recognised in its full and manifold nature?«<sup>80</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, many historians applied holistic thinking to their research, and the use of this approach was embedded in methodological debate, that is, the cleft between historicism and historical positivism at the time.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the holistic aspect of Höfler's research, when considered in relation to historiography, is a critical response to positivistic methodology. Nevertheless, Höfler defended a methodological position that combined both the critical, rational approach of historical positivism and the more big-picture concept of holism, as he formulated it in his essay »Die Eingliederung des Positivismus als Aufgabe«:

It seems to me one of the great possibilities that these two traditions can afford us that we turn our full academic seriousness to the spiritual clarification and the practical mastery of the problem of how positivism can be positively overcome, without abandoning its gains, but by relativising the classification of its goods into the totality of life, art, culture.<sup>82</sup>

However, Höfler's interpretation of Odin also demonstrates his desire to understand Old Norse-Germanic culture as a whole or, in other words, his desire not only to decipher the past but also understand the present through holistic thinking.<sup>83</sup> Thus, Höfler's attempt to solve the riddle-like complexity of the god Odin reflects his somewhat emotional, ideological approach to cultural and philological research.

Höfler's verbose and bombastic style of language and argumentation also impart to the reader a research approach that is at times emotional and ideologically motivated.<sup>84</sup> A detailed analysis of his writing style will not be undertaken here, but a few examples from *KGG* highlight how Höfler writes with a sense that the subject matter is of great significance both from an academic perspective and for a wider, more popular audience. Furthermore, the style of his argumentation points towards the more irrational aspects of his methodology and to a need to compensate for the disputable elements of his research. For example, Höfler often uses exclamation points and direct questions in his text as if to involve the readers in his discussion and to persuade them of the validity of his

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erst, so scheint es mir, treten die vielfachen und scheinbar so widerspruchsvollen Seiten im Bilde dieses berühmtesten Gottes der Germanen zur Einheit zusammen, erst da wird er zur Gestalt.« (Höfler 1934, p. 324).

<sup>80</sup> »Wo begönne denn die Vernebelung der Gestalt und bis zu welchen Grenzen läßt sich in ihrem reichen und mannigfaltigen Wesen noch ein sinnvolles Ganzes erkennen?« (Ibid., p. 325).

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Lundgreen 1990, p. 20; Zernack 2005, pp. 69–71. See also Birkhan 1988, p. 397. Birkhan points towards the influence of Christian von Ehrenfels, a close friend of Höfler's father, and his research on gestalt theory. See Harrington 1996, pp. 108–110 for discussion of holism in relation to von Ehrenfels's writings.

<sup>82</sup> »Es scheint mir eine der großen Möglichkeiten, die diese beiden Traditionsmächte uns gewähren können, daß wir unsern vollen wissenschaftlichen Ernst an die geistige Klärung und die praktische Bewältigung des Problems wenden, wie der Positivismus positiv überwunden werden kann, ohne Preisgabe seiner Gewinne, aber durch relativierende Einordnung seiner Güter in die Ganzheiten des Lebens, der Kunst, der Kultur.« (Höfler 1992, pp. 721–722).

<sup>83</sup> Here I follow Julia Zernack's general argument on Höfler's holistic view of Germanic culture; see Zernack 2005, pp. 69–71 and Burrell 2020, pp. 106–109.

<sup>84</sup> For analysis on language and discourse in relation to ideology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see for example Lobenstein-Reichmann's analysis of Houston Stewart Chamberlain's writing for the *völkisch* movement in Lobenstein-Reichmann 2008.

arguments. In reference to the Wild Hunt and Furious Host legends, he writes: »But is it really possible to call processions that were played out openly in the midst of great noise before the eyes of the public ›secret cults‹? I believe so.«<sup>85</sup> Höfler's use of contrasting language in *KGG* also contributes to the persuasive nature of his text. For instance, he writes:

It shall be shown that these forms of traditional customs charged with demonic-religious forces, as it were, lived on in organisations of the most diverse classes – of the nobles, warriors, townspeople, peasants – but not as a kind of ›amusement‹, as rationalism might believe, but as ritualistic, even ecstatic culminations of community life.<sup>86</sup>

Or, while discussing the ecstatic experience of the sacred men's bands, he states: »Thus this escalating cultic existence does not mean chaos, but order, not instability, but obligation, not a degenerative state, but the formation of binding community with one's ancestors.«<sup>87</sup> Every academic must be persuasive, but Höfler's emphatic rhetoric as well as his engagement with the reader underline his emotional approach to his research topic and his enthusiasm for the potential implications of his theses – in his opinion, proof of the political, state-building power of the Germanic peoples.

Lastly, it should be underlined that Höfler formulated his theory on Germanic men's bands with specific criteria in mind that have led to a particular representation or construction of history.<sup>88</sup> As von See has discussed, each

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<sup>85</sup> »Aber darf man denn Aufzüge, die sich unter tollem Gelärm öffentlich mitten vor den Augen der Menschen abspielten, wirklich als ›Geheimkulte‹ bezeichnen? Ich glaube es.« (Höfler 1934, p. 13).

<sup>86</sup> »Es soll gezeigt werden, daß jene von dämonisch-religiösen Mächten gleichsam geladenen Brauchtumsformen in Verbänden der verschiedensten Schichten – bei Edelleuten, Krieger, Bürgern, Bauern – fortlebten, aber nicht etwa als eine Art von ›Belustigung‹, wie der Rationalismus wohl meinen könnte, sondern als feierliche, ja ekstatische Höhepunkte des Gemeinschaftslebens.« (Ibid., pp. IX–X).

<sup>87</sup> »Diese kultische Daseinssteigerung bedeutet also nicht Chaos, sondern Ordnung, nicht Taumel, sondern Verpflichtung, nicht Hinsinken, sondern Aufbau bindender Gemeinschaft mit den Vorfahren.« (Ibid., p. IX).

<sup>88</sup> Otto Höfler was not the only Germanist of his time who formulated his own characterisation of the Germanic peoples that reflected nationalistic, ideological tendencies. For example, Andreas Heusler (1865–1940) considered the *Germanen* to be aristocratic, areligious, warrior-farmers or »Bauer-Krieger«. His characterisation largely stems from his study of the sagas of Icelanders and his interpretation of Nietzschean ideas, as is reflected in his argument that Old Norse sagas and medieval German heroic poetry represent a form of *Herrenethik* (aristocratic ethics or mannerisms). Heusler's view of the *Germanen* as a *Bauer-Krieger* arguably speaks to *völkisch* and nationalist idealisation of the peasant classes in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Heusler 1926; 1934. For further discussion of Heusler's concept of Germanic culture, see for example Beck 1986a; von See 1983, p. 20; Zernack 1997, p. 156.

Like Heusler, Bernhard Kummer (1897–1962) relies heavily on his skewed interpretation of the Old Norse family sagas in his dissertation *Midgards Untergang (Midgard's Demise)*. Kummer portrays the Germanic peoples as peaceful farmers who had a friendship-like relationship with their gods that was based on the concept of *fulltrúi*. See Kummer 1927, in particular pp. 15ff. Kummer's *Germanenbild* stands in particular opposition to Höfler's; thus, the heated scholarly debate between the two is unsurprising. For further discussion on Kummer's *Germanenbild* and the opposition of Höfler's and Kummer's research, see Engster, pp. 76f.; Heinrich 2008, in particular pp. 254–258 on the conflict with Höfler; Leszczynska 2009, pp. 322–353; von See 1983, pp. 27ff; on the concept of *fulltrúi* see Zernack 1998, pp. 243ff. Similarly, the later works of Gustav Neckel, the successor of Heusler in Berlin, are fuelled by nationalist ideology and idealise and champion the qualities of the German people through examples provided from medieval German and Old Norse texts. See Neckel 1934; 1944; see also Zernack 2004 for further analysis of Neckel's research

characterisation of the Germanic peoples, or *Germanenbild*, reflects certain political, ideological and social norms.<sup>89</sup> One criterion underpinning Höfler's research is the idea that medieval mythological and literary traditions are rooted in ancient cult practices, as discussed above. Hence, Höfler's interpretation of the Wild Hunt, the *einherjar* myth and the *berserkir* as forms of men's cult bands within a holistic framework opposes a more objective analysis of each literary or mythological fragment on its own account in the context of the period of history from which it originates. Likewise, Höfler argues for the continued existence of the Germanic men's bands throughout history in the unpublished second volume of *KGG*, in which social groups such as guilds are argued to be later forms of such ancient men's cults.<sup>90</sup> In other words, the identifiable criterion here is continuity, a theme to which Höfler devoted much scholarly attention, in particular in his lecture »Das germanische Kontinuitätsproblem«, which would stimulate continued discourse on the subject.<sup>91</sup> Of further note is the nationalistic character of his Germanic men's bands. Höfler's emphasis on the political and historical strength of this social unit (its »historisch-politische Kräfte«) and its role at the centre of society to create order and stability endorsed a nationalistic view of German-Germanic culture.<sup>92</sup> Finally, Höfler's research paints a highly exclusive image of ancient Germanic society. According to Höfler, it was the men's bands that served as the pulsating life force of Germanic civilisation. Other members or aspects of society are excluded or subordinated in relation to the cult band. For example, women are absent from Höfler's research, and only those select men who performed initiation rituals became part of the sacred men's bands. Hence, Höfler's concept of Germanic culture glorifies a very specific group of men and is underlined by a nationalistic agenda that argues for the historical continuity of Germanic tradition. And it is these elements of his *Männerbund* theory that offer a significant explanation as to why his research could attract attention from not only modern populist groups but also misogynist, antifeminist groups and individuals, as will be discussed below.

In summary, Höfler's research on Germanic men's bands employs *völkisch* ideology, a selective interpretation of sources and a long-winded and bombastic style of writing to construct a specific image of social tradition. In this respect, his work exemplifies the diffusion of a popular ideological agenda in the scholarship of the early twentieth century. These aspects also explain the relationship between Höfler's theories and political movements in the past and how his research has the potential to influence modern popular conceptions of Old Norse-Germanic culture.

### V. The Reception of Otto Höfler's *Männerbund* Theory in Modern Popular Culture

The remainder of this article will first illustrate that the adoption of Höfler's research by other scholars, both then and more recently, has led to the wider dissemination of his ideas within and outside of the German-speaking world

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during the Third Reich.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. von See 1970, pp. 102f.; 1994, pp. 9–30.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. archival source ÖNB Cod. Ser.n.44.968/1, Höfler's typescript of *KGG* II: II. Teil Zur Soziologie der Geschichte der germanischen kultischen Männerbünde.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Höfler 1938, »The Germanic Continuity Problem« as well as Klaus von See's criticism of Höfler's arguments in von See 1972.

<sup>92</sup> Höfler 1934, p. VIII.

in academia and popular culture. Indeed, it is in some instances through the works of other researchers that basic elements of Höfler's theories have been summarised, translated and disseminated to a wider audience. This in turn has influenced popular conceptions of both Old Norse-Scandinavian and wider Germanic culture. Then, select examples of the use and adoption of Höfler's research on Germanic men's bands in modern cultural contexts will be examined.

Although many of Höfler's contemporaries were critical of his *Männerbund* theory,<sup>93</sup> his research still received favourable attention within a variety of academic fields.<sup>94</sup> In particular, Höfler's characterisation of Odin as leader of the Germanic men's bands was taken up by the Swiss scholar Martin Ninck in his strongly nationalist-racist interpretation of the god in his study *Wodan und germanische Schicksalsglaube*. Ninck did not agree with Höfler's research on all fronts; for example, he remained critical of Höfler's arguments for the continued tradition of Germanic men's bands and his placement of them at the centre of Germanic life.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, *KGG* had an unmistakable influence on Ninck's interpretation of various aspects of Odin's death cult, from the *berserkir* to the *einherjar* and the Wild Army.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, Ninck's research – and therefore Höfler's – was influential beyond the field of *Germanische Altertumskunde*, as is shown by the citation of his work in the psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung's essay »Wotan« from 1936.<sup>97</sup> Jung's essay is a psychoanalytical examination of the National Socialist movement in the 1930s, in which Jung argues that the figure of Wodan represents the consciousness of the German people in its truest form. The essay exhibits parallels to Höfler's research in Jung's conception of both Odin/Wodan and the German *Geist* and its relation to the phenomenon of *Ergriffenheit*, a mystic, spiritual concept that reflects the ecstatic-religious experience of Höfler's sacred men's bands.<sup>98</sup>

Another example of the influence of Höfler's research is found in the dissertation *Der Arische Männerbund. Studien zur indo-iranischen Sprach-und Religionsgeschichte* by the Swedish Indogermanist Stig Wikander (1908-1983).<sup>99</sup> The premise of the study is that the same sociological phenomenon of the Germanic men's bands described in *KGG* can also be found in the Indo-Iranian tradition. Also influential for Wikander was the French religious studies historian Georges Dumézil (1898-1986), whom he had met during Dumézil's tenure in Uppsala, which is where

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<sup>93</sup> See for example the following reviews of *KGG*: Krogmann 1935; Kummer 1935b; 1935c; von der Leyen 1935; 1937; Ranke 1940; Trathnigg 1935.

<sup>94</sup> Thorough analyses of the dissemination of Höfler's research via scholars such as Stig Wikander, Martin Ninck and via the well-known historians of religion Georges Dumézil and Mircea Eliade have already been undertaken, see Ginzburg 2013, pp. 114–131; Lincoln 2000; von Schnurbein 2016, pp. 239–243, 269–285.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Ninck 1935, pp. 102–103 note 1.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 76f.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Jung 1991, pp. 212f. in reference to Ninck's study. Jung's essay was originally published in the *Neue Schweizer Rundschau* iii (Neue Folge), no. 11 (1936). See also the discussion of Höfler and Ninck's influence on Jung's essay in von Schnurbein 2016, pp. 271–272.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Jung 1991, pp. 212f. For discussion of Jung's psychology and essay in relation to Höfler, see Zimmermann 1995, p. 208ff, and for analysis of Jung's essay and specifically his concept of *Ergriffenheit*, see Dohe 2016, 165ff.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Wikander 1938, see in particular p. VII with reference to Höfler's research.

Höfler had also made Dumézil's acquaintance.<sup>100</sup> Höfler's research on the sacred men's bands was also an obvious influence on Dumézil's own work, which adopts some of Höfler's theses on the characteristics of Odin as well as the general concept that social organisations are closely tied to cult and religion.<sup>101</sup> The Romanian historian of religions Mircea Eliade (1898-1986), also a friend of Dumézil's, was another who took up elements of Höfler's research. In particular, the aspects of ecstasy and mumming in the Germanic men's bands are prevalent in Eliade's examination of shamanism and initiation rites in medieval Scandinavian religion.<sup>102</sup>

Further examples of the influence of Höfler's theses include the research of the folklorist Christine Eike, a student of Höfler's, who examines forms of young men's clubs and associations in medieval and early modern Norway, and the work of Hans Peter Duerr, which adopts the notion of the significance of ecstatic cult at the centre of ancient society.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, more recent studies that discuss Germanic and Indo-Germanic *Männerbünde*, such as those by Arnold H. Price and Kris Kershaw (to name only a few), incorporate Höfler's arguments with little or no reflection on the nature of his reconstructionist methodology, let alone the ideological context of his research.<sup>104</sup> These are only a few examples of scholarly works that signify the continued interest in Höfler's research and the relevance thereof in various academic disciplines.

And it is through the research of such renowned scholars as Eliade and Dumézil, as well as more recent studies on Germanic *Männerbünde*, that many of Höfler's core research ideas were disseminated in fields such as history of religions and Indo-Germanic studies. Moreover, such scholarly works have also played a major role in propagating

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<sup>100</sup> For more detail on Stig Wikander, his research, career and relationship to Höfler and Dumézil, see Kahle 1993, in particular p. 264 with reference to Wikander's attendance of Höfler's seminar in Munich, noted in a letter to his supervisor H.S. Nyberg; Lincoln 1998; 1999, pp. 126f., 262–263.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Dumézil 1959, pp. 40–71 in regard to his interpretation of Odin. In particular, Höfler's thesis on sacred kingship was influential for Dumézil; see 1985, pp. 169–170, 208–210 with respect to *Männerbünde* and the warrior function in Scandinavia. See also the following with respect to Höfler's influence on Dumézil: Ginzburg 2013, pp. 114–131; Lincoln 1998, pp. 191–192; 1999, pp. 125–126; von Schnurbein 2016, p. 277.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Eliade 1975, pp. 362–369 in regard to Höfler's concept of ecstasy in the Germanic men's bands, especially in relation to the cult of Odin; 2003, pp. 82–84 with respect to shamanistic initiation rites in the Germanic tradition, in particular in relation to Höfler's interpretation of the berserkers and *berserksgangr*; 1972, pp. 5–9 with respect to Höfler's *Männerbund* theory in general; 1979, pp. 143–145, in which Eliade adopts Höfler's thesis that Odin/Wodan is god of the Germanic men's bands.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Eike 1979, p. i & pp. 8f. with reference to Höfler's research; Duerr 1978, pp. 79–83, with reference to Germanic *Männerbünde* and death cults. For analysis of Duerr's work with relation to *KGG*, see Engster 1986, pp. 83–84; Heizmann 2003, p. 127.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Price 1994, reference to Höfler p. 21; Kershaw 2000, pp. 21f. in regard to Höfler's *Männerbund* theory in general. Kershaw's study has also reached a more popular audience in Germany through the right-wing publishing house Arun-Verlag (first published in German under *Odin. Der einäugige Gott und die indogermanischen Männerbünde* in 2003, now in its third edition as of 2017). Kershaw adopts various aspects of Höfler's interpretation of Odin as god of the Germanic *Männerbünde* and compares Odin to the Indian god Rudra, a comparison that is also made by Höfler in *KGG*, see Höfler 1934, pp. 261–262, note 337a. For critical discussion of Kershaw's study in relation to neo-pagan movements, see von Schnurbein 2016, pp. 241–242, & 293, note 174. On the contrary, there are academics who, while still taking a critical approach to Höfler's works, have found value in his theses for their own research; see for example Ginzburg 1989, who contextualises Höfler's ideas in terms of the ideological influences underlying them, but does include Höfler's analyses in his own research on the witches' Sabbath: see for example, pp. 153–181, 182–204. See also Jens Peter Schjødt's analyses of Höfler's research, specifically in regard to initiation rites in Old Norse literature, in Schjødt 2008, pp. 49–57 & Schjødt 2011.

Höfler's *Männerbund* theory outside of academia as well as outside of an exclusively German-speaking context;<sup>105</sup> examples thereof will be discussed in the following.

The Germanic neo-pagan movement has adopted elements of Höfler's research, specifically select interpretations of Old Norse literature and mythology in his *Männerbund* theory. As the research of Stefanie von Schnurbein shows, this is especially the case in regard to the Asatru movement, which focuses on Old Norse-Scandinavian culture as a source of pagan religion.<sup>106</sup> Von Schnurbein illustrates how Höfler's research made its way to the neo-pagan community indirectly, in part through the mythopoetic men's movement in the 1980s: a movement that looked to renew concepts of masculinity after the advent of feminism by recalling many elements of popular conceptions of *Männerbünde* at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, the writings of Stephen Flowers (also known as Edred Thorsson) and Stephan Grundy (also known as Kveldúlf Gundarsson) spread the ideas of Höfler and other Germanists and historians of religion such as Eliade and Dumézil in the Asatru community directly. These prominent figures of the Asatru community helped to compile the elemental mythology and knowledge of *The Troth*, an international neo-pagan organisation based in the USA, as exemplified in the two-volume work *Our Troth* edited by Kveldúlf Gundarsson.<sup>108</sup> Both individuals were Germanic studies students who received doctoral degrees in the field. They published their ideas on various aspects of Old Norse-Germanic culture and mythology in their theses and in books meant for followers of the Asatru religion.<sup>109</sup> Their endeavour to reconstruct the beliefs, rituals and way of life of the ancient Germanic peoples in a holistic approach through the interpretation of archaeological, literary and later folkloric sources – similar to Germanists at the beginning of the twentieth century such as Höfler – is prevalent in many of their works. A recent example is a series published by Stephen Edred Flowers, titled *The Northern Dawn. A History of the Reawakening of the Germanic Spirit*, written with the intent to »reawaken some vital interest in the roots of our Germanic heritage among the general population of the English-speaking world.«<sup>110</sup> This series explores the possible roots of a »gemeingermanisch« tradition and has the concept of cultural continuity at its core. Höfler is one of many Germanic studies scholars cited in this series, and even the concept of the *Männerbund* both as a religious and politically significant social form of Germanic society is adopted in Flowers's survey of the history of the ancient Germanic cultural tradition.<sup>111</sup>

Particularly relevant in regard to the reception of *KGG* in the neo-pagan community is Grundy's (Kveldúlf Gundarsson's) dissertation *The Cult of Óðinn: God of Death?*. Grundy received his PhD from Cambridge

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<sup>105</sup> For further discussion of the dissemination of Höfler's *Männerbund* research via these and other scholars, in regard to the Asatru movement, see von Schnurbein 2016, pp. 239–243.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. von Schnurbein 2016, in particular pp. 251–297; von Schnurbein 1992, in particular pp. 125–222.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. von Schnurbein 2016, pp. 237ff.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 286–287 for a discussion of these individuals and the lore produced for *The Troth*. Here I follow von Schnurbein's thorough analysis of the Asatru movement and such figures who have transmitted the ideas of scholarly works on Old Norse-Germanic culture from the early twentieth century to the Asatru community.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Flowers 2018, I, p. iii. Originally published in 2006, a revised edition was published in 2017.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 31. Höfler's concept of sacred kinship is also mentioned, see pp. 47f.



University in 1995, and with the support of *The Troth*, it was reprinted in 2014 along with a separate volume titled *Miscellaneous Studies Towards the Cult of Óðinn*. This second volume contains further material originally published separately from Grundy's dissertation.<sup>112</sup> The aim of his dissertation is to analyse the various literary, historical and archaeological sources related to the cult of Odin that underlie Jan de Vries's assumption that Odin's original role in Old Norse mythology was that of a death god.<sup>113</sup> Grundy cites Höfler's research frequently, although he does not brief the reader on its ideological and historical context (nor of other contentious works used in his study as well, such as Martin Ninck's research).<sup>114</sup> In particular, he discusses Höfler's interpretation of the Wild Hunt and Furious Host motifs in relationship to the *berserkir* and *úlfhéðnar* narratives. Moreover, he largely accepts the premise of a fundamental connection between the folk narratives of the Wild Hunt and Furious Host and the death cult of the Germanic men's bands.<sup>115</sup> The conclusions drawn by Grundy concerning Odin as a god of death are well argued; however, the lack of recognition and discussion of the ideological influences underlying several of the secondary sources in his work is problematic. Furthermore, published by Troth Publications, Grundy's dissertation is targeted at a popular audience of Asatru followers who, like Grundy himself, are interested in the reconstruction and continued practice of Germanic (and thus Old Norse) beliefs and rituals. Thus it is unsurprising that Höfler's research concerning the Wild Hunt and Furious Host legends and the cult of Odin is cited in *Our Troth* in regard to their initiation rites and recommended practices for men.<sup>116</sup> Although Grundy does not adopt Höfler's concept of the Germanic men's bands in its entirety, his academic analysis of the cult of Odin imparts certain aspects of Höfler's *Männerbund* theory – as well as the view that ancient ritual is the root of myth and legend – onto a wider audience, thereby influencing popular conceptions of this Old Norse-Germanic god.

Both Grundy and Flowers directly include Höfler's research in their understanding of Old Norse-Germanic culture, but there are also followers of the Asatru religion who adopt aspects of Höfler's *Männerbund* theory via citation by other scholars, again in regard to Höfler's research on Odin in particular. An example is the work *Odin: Ecstasy, Runes & Norse Magic* by Diana L. Paxson, a prevalent figure in the neo-pagan religious movement also associated with *The Troth*. Paxson's discussion of Odin, which also encompasses a brief summary of the Old Norse sources relating to the god and scholarly opinion thereof, forms a kind of handbook for modern ritual practice of Odin worship. Her work even includes music and recommended actions for channelling the god's influence.<sup>117</sup> Various

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. Grundy 2014a, p. viii.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Grundy 2014b, p. xiii.

<sup>114</sup> For example, Grundy refers to Höfler's interpretations of the mythological horse Sleipnir (2014a, pp. 17f.), mumming and masks in Germanic culture (2014a, pp. 30f.), the *einherjar* (2014b, pp. 83f.), sacred kinship and the Rök stone (2014b, pp. 163f.), as well as Höfler's understanding of Odin as god of ecstasy and inspiration (2014b, pp. 205ff.).

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Grundy 2014a, pp. 59–65.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Gundarsson 2007, pp. 248ff. See also von Schnurbein's discussion of Höfler's influence on the Asatru movement as well as the problematic nature of the use of scholarly works that stem from *völkisch* ideology in the formation of neo-pagan belief and ritual: von Schnurbein 2016, pp. 239–243, 260–297.

<sup>117</sup> Such songs include »Wodan's Hunt« written by Kveldúlf Gundarsson (Stephan Grundy) and »God of Ecstasy« written by Paxson; see Paxson 2017, p. 286, 263.

elements of Höfler's research are clearly discernible in her study. These include, for instance, Paxson's interpretation of Odin's sacrifice on the Tree of the World as a shamanistic initiation rite. Paxson refers to Mircea Eliade's research (which is influenced by Höfler) on the subject, and her discussion of both the Old Norse *berserkr* and *úlfhéðnar* warriors and the trials of Sigmund and Sinfjötli in *Völsunga saga* lean heavily on Kris Kershaw's (and therefore Höfler's) interpretation of these figures as belonging to ecstatic men's bands.<sup>118</sup> Moreover, like Höfler, Paxson emphasises the significance of Tacitus's *Germania* in her understanding of Germanic culture. She even compares the warrior bands depicted in *Germania* with today's adolescents and youth soldiers, thereby transmitting the customs of ancient Germanic society into a modern-day concept of youth-military culture:

Anyone who has raised boys can appreciate the benefits of a system that gets them out of town during the years in which their growing strength and raging hormones are most likely to get them into trouble. Going into the army can serve the same purpose today. In the system described by Tacitus, once the young warriors had settled down, they were able to go home and become responsible members of society.<sup>119</sup>

Furthermore, Paxson's discussion of the Wild Hunt and Furious Host legends in relation to Odin implies, at least by example of this particular work, that Höfler's argument of the fundamental relation between Germanic men's bands, the *einherjar* myth and Wild Hunt legends has been accepted here as scholarly fact.<sup>120</sup> Although Paxson does not adopt Höfler's *Männerbund* theory as a whole, aspects of his research have clearly influenced her conception of this Old-Norse Germanic god indirectly through the works of other scholars. Consequently, Paxson's work has contributed to the diffusion of Höfler's research on the Germanic men's bands to a wider audience within the neo-pagan community.

Otto Höfler's interpretation of the legends of the Wild Hunt and Furious Host has also resonated with members of the black metal music scene, influencing musicians' lyrics as well as the musicians' understanding of the black metal movement as a social phenomenon. Varg Vikernes, a racist Norwegian black metal musician sentenced for murder in 1994, and the extremist Austrian musician Gerhard Petak (also known under the names Kadmon and Gerhard Hallstatt) appear to have been affected by Höfler's understanding of the Wild Hunt and Furious Host legends as more than simple nature mythology. Rather, as Petak writes, they form »a union of mythology and folklore, of myth and reality which was of great importance in the Nordic mystery cults.«<sup>121</sup> Petak was inspired by Vikernes's discussions of Norwegian *Oskorei* folklore as well as his own experiences of *Perchtenläufe* growing up in Upper Austria, which he, like Höfler, considered to be a »sincere cultic practice which survived from pre-Christian cultures.«<sup>122</sup> He quotes Höfler's research on the Germanic men's bands and the Wild Hunt and Furious

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<sup>118</sup> Cf. Paxson 2017, p. 74 & 157–163.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. ibid., pp. 205–209.

<sup>121</sup> Moynihn/Söderlind 2003, p. 383. For a detailed discussion of both artists and the reception of Höfler's research on the Wild Hunt in the black metal scene, see Heesch 2011, in particular pp. 344–356.

<sup>122</sup> Moynihn/Söderlind 2003, p. 382.



Host motifs in an essay from 1995 titled »Oskorei«, which he originally published in his music journal *Aorta*.<sup>123</sup> The essay has been reprinted and widely disseminated in the work *Lords of Chaos*, a highly criticised study of the origins and history of the black metal scene, written by the journalist Didrik Søderlind and musician Michael Jenkins Moynihan.<sup>124</sup> In his essay, Petak not only mentions Höfler's research, but also adopts aspects of his *Männerbund* theory and applies them to his understanding of the black metal movement. For example, he highlights Höfler's emphasis on the violent, terroristic aspects of the Germanic men's bands and the Wild Army myths, and, in particular, he underlines their aural element as a central characteristic of their being. In other words, the raucous men's cults are triggered into their ecstatic state through their noise-making and aggressive behaviour, which Petak characterises as »heathen noise« to be equated to black metal itself, only »electronically enhanced.«<sup>125</sup> Several musicians have found it viable to use German-Scandinavian folk tradition and Old Norse mythology for their own conceptions of the past, which they then translate into their music.<sup>126</sup> Petak is no exception, as he directly adopts Höfler's characterisation of Odin's Wild Hunt as a form of Germanic men's band. Indeed, as Florian Heesch has highlighted, musicians in this specific cultural scene have used Höfler's research directly or indirectly when formulating their lyrics and their own self-image, which in some cases also arise from a context of extremist, racist ideology.<sup>127</sup>

In addition, aside from popular cultural contexts, one must also ask to what extent popular right-wing political movements in the twenty-first century have employed or could employ Otto Höfler's research on the Germanic men's bands. As discussed above, right-wing extremists during Höfler's own era were attracted to his research because there was a generally strong interest in nationalism and in championing German-Germanic history. Nationalism and exclusivity thus became the norm, and academia was used to support *völkisch*-racist agendas. It is, therefore, comprehensible that modern right-wing political groups with similar nationalist and populist interests would take an interest in such theories as Höfler's: a prime example thereof is the book *Männerbund* by Karlheinz Weißmann, which was published by the right-wing publishing house Edition Antaios. Weißmann, a follower of the alt-right movement in Germany, traces the history of discourse on *Männerbünde* in German-speaking society,

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<sup>123</sup> Here Kadmon's essay is quoted in its reprinted form in Moynihan/Søderlind's volume *Lords of Chaos*, which was originally published in 1998. The volume was also translated into German in 2002 as *Lords of Chaos. Satanische Metal: Der Blutige Aufstieg aus dem Underground* and published by Index Verlag, now in its ninth edition (2007).

<sup>124</sup> For detailed discussion on the study *Lords of Chaos* and the critical reception of the work see Heesch 2011, in particular p. 346; von Schnurbein 2016, pp. 338–341. Heesch considers Michael Jenkins Moynihan responsible for transmitting Petak's concept of the Wild Hunt to a wider audience in the USA. Moynihan himself is a follower of the Asatru religion as his involvement in Stephen Flowers's series *The Northern Dawn. A History of the Reawakening of the Germanic Spirit* indicates. See Flowers 2018, I; Heesch 2011 pp. 344f. & 350ff. for remarks on Moynihan.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Moynihan/Søderlind 2003, p. 386. For a detailed discussion of Petak's music career, his use of Höfler's research in his essay as well as an analysis of the extent to which Petak adopts and disseminates Höfler's *Männerbund* theory and *Germanenbild* as a whole, see Heesch 2011, pp. 344–356.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Heesch 2011, especially in regard to the black metal scene and its use of the Wild Hunt and Furious Host legends.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 350ff.

including Höfler's research, from the beginning of the twentieth century to the modern day with anti-feminist and misogynist intent.<sup>128</sup>

The notion that exclusive male cult bands form the root of political and social power and tradition aligns with the ideology of misogynist right-wing figures such as the US-American Jack Donovan, whose manifesto *The Way of Men* (2012) addresses »the modern crisis of masculinity.«<sup>129</sup> Widely read in right-wing circles, *The Way of Men* has also sparked interest in Germany and was published in 2016 by the aforementioned Edition Antaios.<sup>130</sup> Donovan, an anti-feminist and long-time member of the hate group »Wolves of Vinland«, considers the social form of the »gang« to be key to true masculinity and imperative to male-dominated society, exclaiming: »the way of men is the way of the gang.«<sup>131</sup> Although Donovan does not cite Höfler's research or demonstrate any awareness of academic discourse on *Männerbünde*, the premise of his book – that (violent) male groups are the creators of political and social change – aligns with Höfler's emphasis on men's bands as the root of Germanic society. Similarly, Donovan sees the »creative kernel of society and culture« in the gang or »insular male group.«<sup>132</sup>

Donovan published two sequels to *The Way of Men*: *Becoming a Barbarian* (2016) and *A More Complete Beast* (2018). In *A More Complete Beast*, Donovan explores the Nietzschean concept of »master morality« and applies it to his discussion of gang-tribal culture and the »Noble Beast«. He writes the following in regard to Nietzsche: »His Übermensch was his aspirational vision for the men of his time, and this Noble Beast, this New Barbarian, is my dream for the men of my time and men within the perimeter of my own circle.«<sup>133</sup> In doing so, Donovan finds confirmation of his violent world view and the necessity of chaos through Nietzsche's dichotomy of the Greek Dionysian and Apollonian elements of man. He goes further in applying this view to Dumézil's concept of Odin and Tyr as a dualistic representation of sovereignty and legality in Old Norse mythology, which Donovan interprets as a »dark-light dualistic collaboration.«<sup>134</sup> Admittedly, elements of Old Norse mythology or literature do not play a major role in Donovan's writings, although he does consider the Old Norse *berserkir* to be examples of such chaotic warrior gangs.<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless, his reference to the Eddic *Hávamál* (»Viking wisdom« as he terms it) when discussing the value of friendship in *The Way of Men* and his adoption of elements of Dumézil's research on Odin

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<sup>128</sup> Cf. Weißmann 2004, pp. 53–60. For discussion of Karlheinz Weißmann's book in the New Right scene in Germany, see Weiß 2018 pp. 233–234.

<sup>129</sup> Donovan 2018, p. 64. Dr Verena Höfig first brought Jack Donovan to my attention in her presentation »Re-Wild Yourself!« Old Norse Myth and Radical White Nationalist Groups in Trump's America« at the conference »Old Norse Myth and *völkisch* Ideology« organised by the University of Basel and University of Lausanne from September 6th–8th 2017 in Basel.

<sup>130</sup> For discussion on the reception of Donovan's book in Germany and comparison to Karlheinz Weißmann's concept of *Männerbund*, see Weiß 2018, pp. 227–234.

<sup>131</sup> Donovan 2012, p. 1.

<sup>132</sup> Donovan 2018, p. 64.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Donovan 2012, p. 45.

in *A More Complete Beast* reveals Donovan's belief that Old Norse literature and mythology support his violent and chauvinistic worldview.<sup>136</sup>

Höfler's research on Germanic men's bands belongs to the realm of academia and, without knowledge of the German language, is not easily accessible (at least in its entirety) to a wider international audience.<sup>137</sup> However, one cannot discount the fact that his research has drawn, and will draw, the attention of populist right-wing groups worldwide via its reception by other scholars or via popular streams on the Internet. Moreover, as is seen in the case of Jack Donovan, similar concepts of masculinity and warrior-gang culture have, as in the past, become influential elements of modern right-wing discourse. As such, the potential for direct and indirect reception of Höfler's theories in modern right-wing movements is a topic worthy of further observation and investigation.

### VI. Concluding Thoughts

Previous research has already pointed out some examples of Otto Höfler's theories that have affected modern popular conceptions of Old Norse (or wider Germanic) culture. The objective of this article has been to further examine this issue and specifically discuss how and why aspects of Höfler's research on Germanic men's bands have been influential. In the process, aspects of his research that make it relatable to currents in modern popular culture, the ideological components thereof in particular, have been illuminated.

Noteworthy aspects are the nature of his research topic itself and Höfler's motivations as a researcher. The *Männerbund* was addressed extensively in academic discourse during the first half of the twentieth century. Likewise, the subject was entwined with nationalistic, *völkisch* discourse on masculinity and social organisations in Germany. Höfler's *Männerbund* theory reflects the relevance of this topic – and of German-Germanic studies in general – to politics and popular ideological movements at that time, as Höfler was well aware. The following quote illustrates how Höfler understood the purpose of his research: »The ›self-confidence‹ of a people depends on how it sees itself, how it feels about its past, how it becomes aware of its nature and its history. This is the tremendous responsibility of historiography: to work for the self-confidence of peoples.«<sup>138</sup> Höfler considered it a responsibility to uncover those aspects of the past that would instil confidence in the future of a nation and its people – an approach that underlines the ideological aspect of his research. Further, Höfler's research incorporates significant material, including folk ritual and folklore, that is historically seen as belonging to the culture of the popular masses of society. Höfler (as well as his *Much-Schule* colleagues) looked to folk tradition and folklore as remnants of ancient cult activities. He thus argues in *KGG* that the *Perchtenläufe* in the alpine regions of Europe or the *Fastnachtspiele*,

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<sup>136</sup> Cf. Donovan 2012, pp. 166–167.

<sup>137</sup> However, there are examples of English scholarly texts that discuss aspects of Höfler's theories, which include: Corrsin 2010, pp. 214ff.; Harris 1993, pp. 78ff.; Kershaw 2000, in particular pp. 21–23; Lincoln 1998, pp. 192ff.; Mees 2000, pp. 324ff.; Price 1994, in particular pp. 21–25; Schjødt 2008 & 2011.

<sup>138</sup> »Das ›Selbstbewusstsein‹ eines Volkes hängt davon ab, wie es sich selber sieht, wie es seine Vergangenheit empfindet, wie ihm seine Art und seine Geschichte bewußt wird. Das ist die ungeheure [sic!] Verantwortung der Geschichtsschreibung: einzusetzen für das Selbstbewusstsein der Völker.« (Höfler 1937, p. 193)

the dramatic plays conducted around Lent, are modern representations or expressions of ancient cult activities. Moreover, Höfler himself writes in his foreword to *KGG* that his work represents »Wissenschaft vom Volk«.<sup>139</sup> When referring to this research concept of Jakob Grimm, Höfler therefore underlines the interdisciplinary nature of his own research, encompassing literary and folklore studies, as well as his agenda to examine the historical traditions of the masses – of the people – for nationalistic purposes. One may thus conclude that Höfler examines folk custom and folklore from a pseudo-academic stance: on the one hand, he assumes the role of a researcher when asserting that such material can be used to better understand cultures of the ancient past. On the other hand, this methodology endorses nationalistic ideologies, championing the concept of a continuity of German-Germanic culture. It is, therefore, unsurprising that individuals or groups who identify themselves with such folk traditions, and with nationalistic thinking, would seek out and use research such as Höfler's to further their own objectives.

On account of its ideological undertones and methodological pitfalls, Höfler's *Männerbund* theory has been received critically over the years by the international scholarly community. Yet some researchers, such as Kris Kershaw, have adopted his general arguments, while others have applied, summarised and disseminated only certain elements of his *Männerbund* theory. This selective use of Höfler's research also applies to the reception of his *Männerbund* theory in popular culture, as has been explored in relation to Germanic neo-pagan movements and the black metal scene. Yet the examples discussed above are not exhaustive, and the influence of Höfler's research in modern popular culture merits further study. Furthermore, given the relevance found in Höfler's research by National Socialist ideologues and their followers, the use of his theories in modern popular right-wing political contexts cannot be ruled out or ignored. And although Jack Donovan seems unaware of Höfler's research, there are fundamental correlations between his concept of the gang and Höfler's sacred Germanic men's band. This raises an important point in regard to the transmission of academic research in characterisations and reconstructions of cultural history in popular media: sometimes theories are summarised and transmitted second-hand, without any reference to the main source of the theory or concept. As this may also apply to Höfler's research (and the research of other scholars!), it is difficult to discern the extent to which his image of the ecstatic men's band has served as inspiration for political groups and other outlets of modern popular culture.

What is certain is that Höfler's *Männerbund* theory retains a great deal of interest. This is witnessed by the recent, reprinted edition of volume I of *KGG* in the new series *Forschungen zum Heidentum* published by the Traugott Bautz Verlag in 2018. Although continued discourse on the existence of Germanic (and Indo-Germanic) *Männerbünde*,<sup>140</sup> as well as other elements of his theory, such as his interpretation of the Wild Hunt and Furious Host legends, make Höfler's research worthy of academic analysis and discussion, this edition's introduction pays little regard to the ideological and socio-political context of *KGG* and the implications thereof.<sup>141</sup> Also questionable

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<sup>139</sup> Höfler 1934, p. XI.

<sup>140</sup> More recent studies on the subject include Kershaw 2000, Price 1994, Hasenfratz 1982 & Falk 1986, who cites Höfler in his study of the *vratyas* in ancient India, pp. 15–17.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Höfler 2018, pp. xiii–xv. The introduction is written by Kris Kershaw.

is the exemption of Höfler's original foreword. It is herein that Höfler underscores the argued socio-political importance of the Germanic men's bands – and thus the nationalistic and *völkisch* sentiments underlying his work – but also, through his description of the intended second volume of *KGG*, their continuity in certain organisations and traditions throughout the Middle Ages to the modern era. And, indeed, it is these aspects of Höfler's work that are so essential for understanding the reception and application of his research in the past as well as today in conceptions of Old Norse-Germanic culture.

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