The Thule Society

‘When I first knew Adolf Hitler in Munich, in 1921 and 1922, he was in touch with a circle that believed firmly in the portents of the stars,’ remembered prominent American journalist Karl H. von Wiegand in an interview with *Cosmopolitan* magazine in 1939.¹

The ‘circle’ mentioned here by the chief correspondent from Hearst International News Service was a society listed in the Munich Register of Associations as a harmless study group that researched early German history. Members were affluent, influential people from Munich society: professors, noblemen, manufacturers, senior officials, businesspeople. Before Hitler came into contact with the Thule Society in 1919, the group had already been organising public talks on various Celtic and Teutonic cultural topics for some time. However, the public was not aware of what took place at the secret meetings, to which only Thule members were invited.

In reality, the Thule Society was much more than an innocent study group: it was a secret brotherhood. The emblem of the Thule Society was the swastika (facing counter-clockwise like the Nazi symbol) and a dagger. The name Thule referred to the old Ultima Thule, the Land of the North, the mythological homeland of the Teutons. Like Atlantis, legend had it that Thule was a vanished civilisation. The members of the Thule Society believed that the lost civilisation of the Teutons had possessed psychic abilities that were far beyond the technical achievements of the twentieth century. They hoped to rediscover the secrets of this legendary

civilisation through occult practises.

There were ‘Teutonic’ secret societies of this kind in Austria and Germany from the mid-nineteenth century. The spiritual concepts of these factions can be grouped under the term ‘Ariosophy’, coined by the Austrian seer Guido von List. These Ariosophic groups were independent of each other organisationally, although many of them were more or less closely linked through personal friendships and mutual members. The notions of the Ariosophes referred to Hindu, Gnostic and hermetic ideas. Magical practises from early and medieval Teutonic times played an important part and the different groups were influenced variously by the Pythagorists, the Neoplatonics, the British mystic Madame Blavatsky, the Rosicrucians, Jakob Böhme, Paracelsus and others. As different as the mystic/magical concepts of the individual groups were, they were linked by their belief in the racist philosophy of Guido von List, which asserted the superiority of the Aryans. In their organisational structure, rituals and terminology, the Ariosophic groups resembled the Freemasons, whom they nevertheless rejected due to their supposed ‘infiltration by Jews’. As with the Freemasons, there were different levels of initiation in the Ariosophes. The members were gradually introduced to the practises of ritual magic. In these rituals, light, colours, rhythms, symbols or aromas were used to focus mental powers and channel them in a specific direction. The Ariosophes believed this would enable them to bring about changes on the material plane.

The Thule Society was the Bavarian branch of the Ariosophic Germanenorden (Teutonic Order), an association of occultists formed in Leipzig in 1912 by the esoteric and anti-Semite Theodor Fritsch. In 1916, after a meeting with Fritsch, Baron Rudolf

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2 See: Appendix 34, Guido von List

3 This information is contained, for example, in: N. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, New York 1985, p.17ff. See also: D. Rose, op. cit., p.19ff

4 See also: P.G.J. Pulzer, *Die Entstehung des politischen Antisemitismus in Deutschland und Österreich 1867–1914*, Gütersloh, 1966. Pulzer described Fritsch (1852–1934) as the ‘most important anti-Semite before Hitler’. Fritsch’s *Handbuch der Judenfrage* was reissued dozens of times
von Sebottendorff assumed leadership of the Bavarian arm, calling it the Thule Society.\(^5\) Sebottendorff was an adventurer and occultist, born in Hoyerswerda, Saxony, in 1875 under the name Ernst Rudolf Glauer. In his autobiography *Der Talisman des Rosenkreuzers* (The Talisman of the Rosicrucian), Sebottenorff discusses his life, which N. Goodrick-Clarke has researched in more detail.\(^6\) Glauer-Sebottendorff had worked on ships, travelling to New York, Sydney, Cairo and Constantinople. He eventually settled in Turkey and there first became involved with occultism. He established contact with the Mevlevi sect of the Whirling Dervishes and was acquainted with the teaching of the Sufis. In his studies, Glauer-Sebottendorff came to the conclusion that Islamic mysticism had Aryan roots. This opinion linked him with Guido von List. The forefather of Ariosophy proclaimed that not just Islam but *all* religious systems were derived from one single original religion, the religion of the Aryans. In 1910, Glauer-Sebottendorff founded a mystic lodge in Constantinople. One year later, he was adopted by Baron Heinrich von Sebottendorff, and so became a baron himself. He returned to Germany in 1913 and married the daughter of a prosperous Berlin businessman. Three years later, he assumed leadership of the Thule Society in Munich.

Women were scarcely represented in the Thule Society, the higher levels of initiation being reserved exclusively for men. Those wishing to join had to complete a questionnaire and submit a photograph, which was examined for purity of race. The following ‘blood declaration’ also had to be filed: 'The undersigned assures to the best of his knowledge and conscience that no Jewish or coloured blood flows through his veins or those of this wife and that there are no family members of coloured race among his forefathers.'\(^7\) Unlike most other Ariosophic groups, the Thule Society was not content merely with influencing material circumstances through visualisations

\(^5\) R. Sebottendorff, *Bevor Hitler kam*, Munich 1933, pp.53, 62. According to Rudolf von Sebottendorff, the Thule Society had 250 members in Munich and 1,500 throughout Bavaria in November 1918

\(^6\) N. Goodrick-Clarke, op. cit., p.135ff

\(^7\) R. Sebottendorff, op. cit., p.42
and ritual magic: the group was also politically active. When the Bavarian King was
deposed and the communists took power in November 1918, the opulent meeting
place of the Thule Society, the luxury Four Seasons Hotel, became a centre of
counter-revolutionary activities.\textsuperscript{8} The Thule Society also set up a fighting division
that took an active part in the power struggle during the revolution in Munich.\textsuperscript{9} In
April 1919, it enlisted volunteers, who were smuggled by train in their hundreds to
Eichstätt to participate in the attack against the communist regime from there.\textsuperscript{10} After
the overthrow of the communist government in May 1919, the Thule Society shifted
its political activities to the field of propaganda. In October 1918, when German
defeat in the First World War was imminent, the Thule Society established a Political
Workers’ Union, from which the DAP (Deutsche Arbeiter Partei, German Workers’
Party) arose. Individual Thule members then appeared as speakers in the DAP. As
depicted in this novel, Hitler came across the small, insignificant party during a
lecture in September 1919. Soon afterwards, he became the fifty-fifth member of the
party. Hitler must have quickly realised who was behind the DAP, because he
promptly demanded an end to the influence of the Thule Society over the party. Two
months after Hitler joined he set down points of order that stated: ‘Excludes all forms

\textsuperscript{8} The Thule Society also invited other nationalistic groups to conspiratorial meetings at the Four Seasons. These
included the Aldeutschen (All-Germans); Rohmedi’s Schulverein (School Association); and the Hammerbund
(Hammer League). See also: R. Sebottendorff, op. cit., p.62

\textsuperscript{9} The Thule Battle League had a branch on the outskirts of Munich in Eching and maintained contact with the
legal Bavarian government in Bamberg. Members of the League carried out acts of sabotage against Munich’s Red
Army and planned to kidnap the communist state leader, Kurt Eisner. It appears that there was also a connection
between the Thule Society and Eisner’s murderer, Count Arco-Valley. See also: H. J. Kuron, Freikorps and Bund
pp.39, 43; H. Gilbhart, op. cit., p.92

\textsuperscript{10} See also: H. Gilbhart, op. cit.; D. Rose, op. cit.. On the 19th of April 1919, Sebottendorff was authorized by
Bamberg to set up a freecorps. Consequently he opened a recruitment office in the Hotel Deutscher Kaiser in
Nuremberg (R. Sebottendorff, op. cit., pp.125–34.) Sebottendorff’s account is confirmed by the Nuremberg Thule
member Franz Müller (‘Erfahrungen eines alten Vorkämpfers’, HA Koblenz No. 1249, see: R. Phelps, ‘Before
Hitler Came’, Journal of Modern History, 1963, p.259.) Sebottendorff’s ‘Oberland’ freecorps then took part in the
conquest of Munich. The freecorps fought along the Ruhr in 1920 and against Poland in Oberschlesien in 1921.
The successor, Bund Oberland, played an important part in Hitler’s coup in 1923

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of dictation [for the party committee] by a superior or lateral government, whether it be a circle or lodge, once and for all’.\textsuperscript{11}

This put an end to the Thule Society’s influence over the DAP. Thule party chairman Karl Harrer resigned. However, some Thule members maintained close contact with Hitler after separation of the Thule Society and DAP, most notably the eventual Deputy Führer, Rudolf Hess, and the subsequent editor-in-chief of the most important Nazi paper, the Völkischer Beobachter (Nationalist Observer), Dietrich Eckart. It is known that Eckart soon came to see Hitler as the long-awaited ‘saviour’.\textsuperscript{12} Rudolf Hess also seems to have been mesmerised by Hitler. Most Thules saw Hitler as the ‘drummer’, the herald, the prophet of who was to come. Some, like Rudolf Hess, might have seen him from the very beginning as being ‘the one’. But certainly there were also other opinions of Hitler in the Thule Society. It is very likely that the ex-DAP chairman Harrer was not the only one to reject the monopolisation of the party by Hitler. It seems reasonable to assume that Hitler would have been the cause of disagreements and divisions within the Thule Society.

At any rate, after Hitler joined the DAP, the Thule Society fell quiet. It was not involved in the power struggles between the different radical right-wing groups and splinter groups in Munich at the start of the 1920s. It is not proven that Hitler ever set foot in the meeting rooms of the Thule Society in the Four Seasons Hotel. Johannes Hering’s notes on meetings of the Thule Society between 1920 and 1923 mention the presence of several Nazi leaders but never Hitler himself.\textsuperscript{13} Hitler

\textsuperscript{11} Draft of standing orders for the DAP from December 1919, BA Koblenz NS2627 quoted from: A. Joachimsthaler, op. cit., Munich 2000, p.265

\textsuperscript{12} See: Appendix 35, The Expected Saviour

\textsuperscript{13} Johannes Hering, ’Beiträge zur Geschichte der Thulegesellschaft’, manuscript from 21 June 1939, HA Koblenz, S 26/865, quoted from: N. Goodrick-Clarke, op. cit., p.201
certainly knew how to use his contacts with influential Thule members to his advantage. Their patronage and financial support was of decisive importance during the initial period of his rise. Dietrich Eckart put Hitler in contact with affluent Munich residents, and Thule sympathiser Wilhelm Frick, advisor of Munich’s Chief of Police, guarded his party protectively.

Driven by Hitler’s relentless propaganda, the DAP (which Hitler renamed the NSDAP) rapidly developed into a mass movement. The National Socialist movement no longer had anything in common with the conspiratorial gatherings of the Thule members. The dignified atmosphere of the Four Seasons with talks on the early Teutonic age and magic initiation rituals as outlined by Guido von List was in stark contrast to the party meetings in beer cellars, where drunkenness, raucousness and often brawls were commonplace. The mass deployments of the SA (Stormtroopers) were also a world apart from the rarefied atmosphere of the luxury hotel. It is hardly surprising that the number of Thule members who joined the NSDAP was relatively low. However, some of those who did join the party later took up important positions.14

After 1926, there were no further signs of life from the Thule Society, but it reappeared with the triumph of the Nazis in 1933. Sebottendorff, who had lived abroad since 1919, re-emerged in Munich and published a book entitled Bevor Hitler kam (Before Hitler Came). He also published a magazine, the Thule Bote (Thule Herald), and organised Thule meetings at the Four Seasons Hotel again. However, the rebirth of the Thule Society was short-lived. When the second edition of Sebottendorff’s book was about to appear in 1934, it was seized by the Nazis and the author was imprisoned. His fate had been sealed when he claimed that Hitler owed his initial successes to the Thule Society. Hitler, who never mentioned the Thule Society in Mein Kampf or elsewhere, knew that it could only harm him politically if it were to emerge that such a close link existed between an obscure society of spiritualists and the start of his movement. There are contradictory accounts of

14 See: Appendix 41, Prominent Thule Members
Sebottendorff’s eventual fate. N. Goodrick-Clarke reports that Sebottendorff travelled through Switzerland to Turkey, where he committed suicide in 1945 after Germany’s defeat. Reginald H. Phelps quotes Sebottendorff’s publisher, H. G. Grassinger, who claims that Sebottendorff was killed by the Nazis. The Thule Society continued to exist officially until 1937 and then quietly disbanded.

The Thule Society is significant to the Nazi movement not just because Hitler assumed control of the DAP from it. Sebottendorff, the Grandmaster of the Thule Society, was also the owner of the Eher publishing house, which Hitler bought in 1920 and turned the newspaper produced there into the Völkischer Beobachter (Nationalist Observer), which quickly became the most important weapon in the Nazi propaganda arsenal. Additionally, evidence suggests that Hitler also appropriated the Thule Society’s emblem, the swastika, as well as the ‘Sieg Heil’ form of greeting.

Hitler took the party, his first supporters, the newspaper, the gestures and the swastika from the Thule Society and used these external aspects as a ‘suit of armour’ (in the words of Sebottendorff). The Grand Master of the Thule brotherhood is not exaggerating when he claims that it was this ‘suit of armour’ that helped Hitler to gain power in a period of time that would otherwise seem unnaturally short. The many links between Hitler and the Thule Society have been proven incontrovertibly by historical research. The counter-revolutionary activities of the Thule members during the revolutionary period in Munich have been examined and documented in detail. Conversely, the occult background of this secret society – the rituals and esoteric teachings of the Ariosophes – is barely acknowledged in serious historical texts and is often not even mentioned. There are, however, countless non-scientific books that

15 See: Appendix 42, Völkischer Beobachter


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deal mainly with the occult aspect of the Thule Society. As the correlation between the Thule Society and the beginnings of the Nazi movement is not disputed, the fact that the Thule Society was also an occult lodge opens up a virtually endless realm of possible speculation. Some ‘Nazi occult’ authors come to the conclusion that the roots of National Socialism can be found in the occult philosophies of the Thule Society. However, this is not strictly accurate. The extent to which certain aspects of Guido von List’s world view may have been incorporated into Nazi ideology is discussed in more detail in Appendix 34, Guido von List.

Historical science may never have addressed the theories of Nazi occult authors seriously, but the flood of Nazi occult publications has created its own reality over time. In the world of these theories, National Socialism becomes a movement controlled by higher powers. Some authors claim that Hitler was used by the Thule members for their purposes. Hidden Masters of the Thule Society allegedly manipulated Hitler using telepathy and turned him into a medium. Other authors claim that Hitler was instructed in magical practises by the Thule Society. However, there is not the slightest evidence of the secret command group that was supposed to have controlled Hitler, or of Hitler’s occult leanings. What can be said with great certainty on the basis of historically proven fact is that Hitler exploited the Thules, and not vice versa. He maintained the necessary contact as long as it was advantageous to him. Once he no longer needed the Thule Society, he ignored it and denied it. However, that does not mean that the mystic notions of the Thules did not play a significant part in Hitler’s rise. On the contrary: what would have become of Hitler if he had not come across this society? What would have become of his delusions if certain members of this group of influential people had not validated them? This in turn could only happen because the spiritual beliefs of the Thules led them to expect a messianic figure, a saviour, referred to as ‘der Starke von Oben’ (literally: the Strong One from above). The myth that immediately formed around

17 See: Appendix 17, Hitler and the Occult
Hitler and was instrumental in his meteoric rise to power has its origin in the beliefs of the faithful disciples of Thule.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{18} See: Appendix 35, The Expected Saviour