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Working Paper 22-041



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*Caccia selvaggia: Myth, Rites, and the Right in Carlo Ginzburg's Storia notturna*

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Non si può dedicare un certo numero di  
anni allo studio dei miti o dei materiali  
mitologici senza imbattersi più volte nella  
cultura di destra e provare la necessità di  
fare i conti con essa.  
—Furio Jesi, *Cultura di Destra*

“Since yesterday the snow has been falling endlessly. It accumulates in drifts, like it used to do in Bucharest in the winter.” So begins the 19 December 1973 entry in Mircea Eliade’s diary.

Memories surge up in me: I think of my childhood, of the attic on Strada Melodie, of the little windows that sometimes disappeared under the snow and the frost. I’d like to immerse myself in one of my favorite “winter reading materials,” *Gösta Berling*, for example, or *Le problème des Centaures* by Georges Dumézil.<sup>1</sup>

Unexpressed in Eliade’s reverie, important links bind together the wintry days around Christmas, Selma Lagerlöf’s beloved novel, and Dumézil’s riotous centaurs. We will little-by-little return to these links and to the light they shed on three of the central ethical, political, and historiographical problems in Carlo Ginzburg’s work: the problems of myths and rites, questions and answers, and myth and history. Ginzburg, for his part, may find this framing, this use of Eliade, tedious or worse: in 2013 he warned his interviewers to avoid Eliade—“the boring

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<sup>1</sup> Eliade, *Journal III 1970-1978*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 136.

Eliade, the dreary Eliade”—but, though Ginzburg was certainly not influenced in any positive sense by Eliade’s work, now slipping ever more rapidly into scholarly oblivion, his approach to these three problems has often been framed, sometimes directly, sometimes obliquely, in relation to Eliade and Eliade’s favorite “reading materials”.<sup>2</sup>

In a probing set of “reflections”, Tony Molho has rightly discerned a change in the ethical tone of Ginzburg’s scholarship. A “humanist Marxism” had always been subtly “woven into the fabric” of it, but around the mid-1980s, Ginzburg’s tone became uncompromising, “categorical in rejecting positions [he] considered morally equivocal, anxious to identify those with whom he disagreed and whose ethical behaviour he considered unacceptable, even dangerous.”

Speculating on the cause, Molho has cautiously pointed to Ginzburg’s 1984 essay “Mitologia germanica e nazimo,” where he sides (albeit with what Molho calls “restraint”) with Momigliano in a polemic against Dumèzil.<sup>3</sup> Unremarked upon by Molho, this transformation also occurred during the writing of Ginzburg’s masterpiece *Storia notturna*, where he took Dumézil’s grand subject as his own.<sup>4</sup> By reconstructing a never written alternative version of *Storia notturna*, one loosely centered around the phenomenon of the Wild Hunt (*caccia selvaggia*), in this essay we will explore Ginzburg’s ethical turn and his apparent project—even more ambitious than deciphering the sabbath—to reclaim myth from the Right.

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<sup>2</sup> “Entretien avec Carlo Ginzburg”, *ASDIWAL: Revue genevoise d'anthropologie et d'histoire des religions* 2013. pp. 5-18, 16. Sergio Botta, “Lo sciamanesimo di *Storia notturna* e le tecniche arcaiche dell’estasi. Sul dialogo a distanza tra Carlo Ginzburg e Mircea Eliade”, in Cora Presezzi, ed., *Streghe, sciamani, visionari: In margine a Storia notturna di Carlo Ginzburg* (Rome: Viella, 2019), 329-56, has overstated the case for Eliade’s influence.

<sup>3</sup> Molho, “Carlo Ginzburg: Reflections on the Intellectual Cosmos of a 20th-Century Historian”, *History of European Ideas* 30.1 (2004): 121-148, 139-40.

<sup>4</sup> *Storia notturna: Una decifrazione del sabba* (Turin: Einaudi, 1989) [hereafter SN] and *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches’ Sabbath*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Hutchison Radius, 1990; and then New York: Pantheon, 1991) [hereafter E].

## 1. Work in Progress

Ginzburg's short 1981 essay "Charivari, associations juvéniles, chasse sauvage", delivered in Paris in 1977 perhaps two years into the start of the work on *Storia*, and (notably) never translated into English, represents a road not taken in Ginzburg's magnum opus. This is made clear in an ambitious final note declaring, "[i]n a book in preparation I propose to verify these conclusions [of this essay] in an ambit vaster both from a chronological and a spatial point of view".<sup>5</sup> Starting from the well-known interpretations, respectively formal and functional, of Levi-Strauss, who focused on the charivari as community censure against socially unacceptable marriages, and E.P. Thompson, who surveyed under the umbrella term "rough music" a much wider range of acts of popular justice in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, Ginzburg, after portentously (given the coming direction of his work) noting the slowness of formal change as against the rapidity of functional change, goes back to the earliest known account of a charivari, an early-fourteenth-century interpolation in a manuscript of the *Roman de Fauvel*, where, already around the turn of the twentieth century, Otto Driesen (a German Jew who likely died at Sobibor or on his way there) had found hints of the *mesnie Hellequin*, the host of the demon Herlechinus (likely origin of Arlecchino and Harlequin), and of the so-called Wild Hunt.

[Figure 1] Ginzburg links both the night-battling benandanti and various "youth groups" with carnivalesque rituals, the sort described by Natalie Zemon Davis in her 1971 essay "Reasons of

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<sup>5</sup> In Jacques Le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt, eds., *Le charivari* (Paris: EHESS, 1981), 131-140. We cite and translate Ginzburg, "Charivari, associazioni giovanili, caccia selvaggia," *Quaderni storici* 49.1 (1982):164-77, 177n43. Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Les masques, le diable, les morts dans l'Occident médiéval", *Razo. Cahiers du Centre d'études médiévales de Nice* 7 (1986): 87-119, can be read as a response to Ginzburg's "charivari" essay and the work of Karl Meuli on masks; rather than seeking a single meaning (the mask as the dead) it focuses on the multifaceted perversity of the mask as a sign, as a *similitudo* that induces transformation.

Misrule”, to the multifaceted myth of the Wild Hunt, “the mythical background of the oldest phase of the charivari”, wherein participants impersonated the dead.<sup>6</sup> But that is not all. “The Christianization of the ‘Wild Hunt’ was gradually accompanied by its demonization,” Ginzburg concludes, and “[t]hrough a long elaboration by theologians, demonologists and inquisitors, the ranks of the wandering dead were reshaped and distorted, until they took on the monstrous physiognomy of the witchcraft sabbath.”<sup>7</sup> Though the details of this long elaboration are lacking, the witches’ sabbath is here seemingly already *decifrato*: it was the result of a learned Christian distortion and demonization of the Wild Hunt in various forms.

Ginzburg’s interest in the Wild Hunt was not new. It can be easily traced back to 1966’s *I benandanti*, where he already discussed the Christianization of the Wild Hunt, which once had “expressed a very ancient, pre-Christian fear of the dead seen as mere objects of terror”. It was indeed in “the fearful traits of the ancient Wild Hunt” that Ginzburg discerns “the fundamental similarity between the wandering dead and the witches against whom the benandanti fought at night”. Knowing that the ecstatic journeys of the benandanti had occurred around the quarterly fasting periods of the liturgical calendar, Ginzburg had also discovered a crucial parallel in the early sixteenth-century sermons of Geiler von Kaiserberg on the theme of “superstitions connected to the Ember season [*quattro tempora*]... in particular during the Ember Days of

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<sup>6</sup> On the essays of E.P. Thompson and Natalie Zemon Davis discussed here, in Ginzburg’s essay, and again in E 201n48, SN 181n48, where he notes that “[t]he mythical implications are neglected in the otherwise excellent essays devoted to the charivari by N. Z. Davis... and E. P. Thompson”, see Alexandra Walsham, “Rough Music and Charivari: Letters between Natalie Zemon Davis and Edward Thompson, 1970-1972”, *Past & Present* 235.1 (2017): 243-262. Walsham, 243-44, notes that, together with their celebrated articles on “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd” and “The Rites of Violence”, in *Past & Present* 50 and 59 (1971 and 1973), these pieces “provid[ed] compelling new templates for the study of symbolic action and collective behaviour”. The relationship of *Storia notturna* to them is a fascinating topic, though one we cannot here address.

<sup>7</sup> Ginzburg, “Charivari, associazioni giovanili”, 169, 175.

Christmas [*tempora di Natale*], the holiest of all according to popular belief, [when] the ‘Furious Horde’ appeared, composed of people who had died before their time”.<sup>8</sup>

Published in the “recherches en cours” section of *Annales* early in 1984, Ginzburg’s short essay “Présomptions sur le sabbat” provides a wealth of information about his working methods and the evolution of his thought. In his own telling, Ginzburg, at work on the book that will become *Storia notturna*, had immediately uncovered two linked sequences of evidence, with enough material to fill a “fairly substantial dossier”:

- (1) Evidence concerning the myth of *the savage or furious army* or on *the troop of the dead*, generally guided by a male deity, like Herlechinus or Odin; and
- (2) Evidence concerning women who dream of flying at night, riding on animals, following Diana or other feminine deities, like Herodias or Perchta.

A second dossier, this time on battles for fertility, had also begun to rapidly grow in size and scope, far beyond the borders of the first (“essentially Franco-German but with an important extension to the Po Valley”) dossier: starting with the Friulian benandanti, the Dalmatian kresniki, and the Livonian werewolf Thiess (all present already in *I benandanti*), this “second dossier” grew to contain other parallels from Corsica, the Balkans, Hungary, Ossetia, Lapland, and Siberia. Before long, Ginzburg had glimpsed the heart of the coming *Storia notturna*: “a profound isomorphism embracing phenomena scattered over a huge geographical area, of which we have information dating from remote antiquity”.<sup>9</sup> It is four divergent but interconnected lines

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<sup>8</sup> Ginzburg, *I benandanti: Stregoneria e culti agrari tra Cinquecento e Seicento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1972) [hereafter B], 69, 76, 80, 90-91, revision of the first (Turin: Einaudi, 1966) edition; and *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (London, Melbourne, and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983) [hereafter NB], 44 with minor adjustments, 48, 51, 58-59.

<sup>9</sup> Ginzburg, “Présomptions sur le sabbat”, *Annales HSS* 39.2 (1984): 341-354. We use “Deciphering the Sabbath,” in *Early Modern Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, eds. Bengt Ankerloo and Gustav Henningsen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 121-38, 126-27.

of research, described in a truly remarkable footnote bursting with ideas and references in the middle of “Présomptions”, that allow Ginzburg to link the dossiers, make sense of the vast isomorphism, and unite the witches’ sabbath to a deep Eurasian substrate.<sup>10</sup> Here [Figure 2] is diagram showing the relationships among the four lines of research.

The second (feminine, flight-oriented) sequence of the first dossier is on much fuller display in the published *Storia notturna* of 1989 but it is the first that seems to have been, still at this point, years after the publication of “Charivari” with its bold yet abortive thesis and its “male associations” enacting rites of misrule, the more deeply researched (by Ginzburg if not also, naturally, by his scholarly forebears). In examining the first sequence (masculine, the wild hunt), it is precisely “the aspects ignored by [Margaret] Murray,” the Egyptologist and folklorist who in her celebrated 1921 *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* had claimed to have found in the witch trials evidence of the rites of what she argued was a long-surviving pre-Christian fertility cult, which are “most interesting” to Ginzburg:

They relate, for instance, to the typically pre-sabbath theme of the procession of the dead (the “wild hunt” or “wild army” [“*chasse sauvage*” ou “*armée sauvage*”). The very full dossier produced by a century of research on this subject includes extracts from penitentials from the high Middle Ages, records of trials, sagas, and even descriptions of rites still surviving in contemporary folklore, in which individuals disguised as animals run about village streets, generally during the “twelve days” [of Christmas]. It has been held with some reason that these rites are very closely related to the myth of the “savage army [armée sauvage]”, with the disguised individuals personifying, or having personified, the assemblage of the errant dead. But clearly this does not allow us to retrospectively interpret all the accounts which speak of processions of the dead, as descriptions of real events, which would indicate the persistence of a very old ritual performed by groups of young people in cultic associations with a warlike background.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The footnote in “Présomptions”, n13 at 352-53, is converted to a multi-part endnote, A 1-4, in “Deciphering”, 136-137.

<sup>11</sup> “Deciphering”, 134.



The talk of rowdy (male) youth associations and of the “Wild Hunt” seems to point back to Ginzburg’s “Charivari” essay, and to the nexus of issues treated by Zemon Davis and Thompson, but Ginzburg’s phraseology (“It has been held... But...”) suggests that the “Charivari” thesis has already, at least in part, been rethought. “Présomptions” in a more than procedural way captures a mid-point in the development of *Storia notturna*. More importantly, a very potent tension, between *evidence of myth* (the Savage Army) and *evidence of rites* (“rites still surviving... real events... persistence of a very old ritual...”), has now lurched into the foreground.

## 2. Political Implications

By the time *Storia notturna* is published in 1989, the theme of the Wild Hunt has all but disappeared, discussed in a single short section (II.1.11) of two paragraphs and then dismissed in the next with these pregnant sentences: “The dilemma that faces us at this point has *not only intellectual implications*. The traditions concerning the ‘furious army’ have been interpreted as a *coherent mythical and ritual configuration*, in which, through implicit or explicit reference to the figure of Wotan, a remote and persistent warrior vocation of German men is expressed.”<sup>12</sup> Wotan was perhaps strongest in the interwar years. Jung, in his strange 1936 essay on the figure, named Wotan the archetype of the Germans, their *Ergreifer*, the rouser of the storm “that blows into Europe from Asia’s vastness, sweeping in on a wide front from Thrace to the Baltic, scattering the nations before it like dry leaves, or inspiring thoughts that shake the world to its foundations”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> SN 79, E 102. Our emphasis.

<sup>13</sup> Carl G. Jung, “Wotan” in Jung, *Collected Works 10: Civilization in Transition*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), §§371-99, §391; we largely agree with the

Ginzburg’s “Charivari” essay is also all but missing from *Storia*, but one may nonetheless find there an oblique, reticent note on the essay’s reception: “In criticizing my interpretation, [the German folklorist and cultural historian Hermann] Bausinger has observed that it reproduces in substance that of [Otto] Höfler... I should have underlined this—together with the fact that Höfler had in turn been preceded by [Karl] Meuli...”<sup>14</sup> Meuli, the Swiss philologist and folklorist, had meaningfully distanced himself from Nazism and Nazi racial concepts during the war.<sup>15</sup> Another later note in *Storia* on “the ideological matrix (Nazi) and the widespread fortune” of Otto Höfler’s 1934 *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen*, in which Ginzburg is careful to delineate what of Höfler’s thesis may be saved and what may not, more than clarifies what is really at stake—those *implicazioni non solo intellettuali*—in Bausinger’s pages on the essay, where Ginzburg’s “Charivari” thesis is not so much critiqued as dismissed as “by no means strange or new to the folklorist” since Höfler had argued the same thing fifty years earlier and his

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conclusion about this essay of Carrie B. Dohe, “Wotan and the ‘archetypal *Ergriffenheit*’: Mystical Union, National Spiritual Rebirth and Culture-Creating Capacity in C.G. Jung’s ‘Wotan’ Essay”, *History of European Ideas* 37 (2011): 344-356.

<sup>14</sup> SN xxxix; E 24; SN 181n47, our translation instead of E 201n47. Meuli dedicated a 1953 essay to the topic “Charivari”, reprinted in *Gesammelte Schriften*, two volumes, ed. Thomas Gelzer (Basel and Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1975) [hereafter *GS*], I, 471-484, in which he traces the origins of the word to a hunting cry and the origins of the practices of popular justice to game hunting. This is not the work that Ginzburg has in mind, as we will see below, in the response to Bausinger, but it was the only work by Meuli cited in Ginzburg’s earlier “Charivari, associazioni giovanili”, 176n21. There Ginzburg notes that “Meuli insists on the connections between *charivari* and the hunt (real, not mythical)”. Rites not myths. In his “Charivari” essay, Ginzburg cites Meuli’s “Charivari” essay as it was first printed, and not in the two-volume *GS*, suggesting that Ginzburg was not at that point yet familiar with Meuli’s full corpus of works. A concise overview of Meuli’s ideas may be found in Fritz Graf, review of *GS*, *Gnomon* 51.3 (1979):209-16.

<sup>15</sup> See Karl Meuli, “Volstum, Sitte, und Brauch [1940]” and “Ansprache am Bankett der Volkskundetagung vom 19 September 1938”, in Meuli, *GS*, I, 487-91 and 541-42. On Meuli’s relationship with *Volkskunde*, see Regina F. Bendix, “From *Volkskunde* to the ‘Field with Many Names’: Folklore Studies in German-Speaking Europe Since 1945”, in Bendix and Galit Hasan-Rokem, eds., *A Companion to Folklore* (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 2012), 364-390, 369.

thesis had since been jettisoned through rigorous historical *Quellenkritik*.<sup>16</sup> Ginzburg did not, not even by the time of the “Présomptions” (certainly more than three years after “Charivari”), fully agree with Bausinger’s dismissal of Höfler, describing *Kultische Geheimbünde* as “a work which, unlike [Margaret] Murray’s, continues to be accepted as a standard authority, even by scholars of the first rank.” But did it remain the accepted reference? On this point Ginzburg cites only works from the period 1935-39: a positive review by Karl Meuli (later followed, Ginzburg notes, by “a more cautious critical judgment”), Stig Wikander’s *Der arische Männerbund*, and Georges Dumèzil’s *Mythes et dieux des Germains*, the very book at the center of Ginzburg’s “Mitologia germanica”, published the same year as “Présomptions” and properly highlighted by Molho in trying to explain Ginzburg’s mid-1980s ethical transfiguration.<sup>17</sup> Bausinger cites and certainly had foremost in mind an essay attempting a point-by-point refutation of Höfler’s book written by Friedrich Ranke, called by Ginzburg one “among a few dissonant voices,” which Ginzburg rejects in the strongest terms, calling its central thesis, that the evidence regarding the Wild Hunt was merely expressions of morbid psychological states, “manifestly absurd, as unacceptable (albeit for quite different reasons) as the thesis put forward by Höfler”:

Höfler’s view is rather open to the same objection as Murray’s, namely, that it rests on *a gross confusion between myths and rites*. In Höfler’s case the implications are far from innocent: the ritual continuity between the Harii described by Tacitus, the Icelandic *berserkir*, and the processions of groups of young men disguised as animals fits in with the exaltation of the “ecstatic cult of

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<sup>16</sup> SN 152n2; E 173n2; Hermann Bausinger, “Traditionale Welten, Kontinuität und Wandel in der Volkskultur”, *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 81.2 (1985): 265-86, quotation at 271, discussion of Ginzburg and Höfler at 271-73, incorrectly cited at SN 181n47. On Höfler, see Helmut Birkhan, “Otto Höfler. Nachruf”, in *Sonderabdruck aus dem Almanach der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 138 (1988): 385-406, especially 400-01. Some of the complexities of the “Nazi matrix” of Höfler’s ideas are laid out in Esther Gajak, “Germanenkunde und Nationsozialismus. Zur Verflechtung von Wissenschaft und Politik am Beispiel Otto Höflers”, in Walter Schmitz and Clemens Vollnhals, eds., *Völkische Bewegung—konservative Revolution—Nationalsozialismus* (Dresden: Thelem, 2005), 325-355.

<sup>17</sup> “Deciphering”, 134 and, importantly, 134n26.

the German religion of the dead,” and communion with the dead as a unique source of social and tribal energy. This theory, with its unmistakably Nazi overtones, so dominated Höfler’s research that it led him to depreciate the connotations of fertility present that were part of this mythic complex, and to exalt those which related to warfare. But this distortion of the interpretation is part of a more general methodological error: that of reducing to pure coincidence the complicated relationship between myths and rites.<sup>18</sup>

One last observation must be made about Ginzburg’s part-defense and part-rejection of Höfler: at this point (“Présomptions”) his judgment is perhaps even more explicitly positive than Meuli’s. In a 1943 work, after noting (as Ginzburg would repeat) that he had come up with his arguments about the *Männerbünde*—that such all-male groups wore masks, and that these masks represented the dead—“completely independent of and almost at the same time as Höfler,” Meuli declared that he agreed in many respects with Ranke’s “lively and often dismissive critique” of Höfler’s book published in 1940, the very critique Ginzburg fiercely rejected.<sup>19</sup> By the time *Storia notturna* is published, though, Ginzburg no longer apparently felt compelled to defend Höfler and *Kultische Geheimbünde* as an “accepted authority”. Nor, indeed, to take Dumèzil’s Tripartite Ideology as seriously. Of the more than 60 works cited in “Présomptions” only a handful do not also later appear in *Storia*, among them Meuli’s positive review and reconsideration of Höfler, Meuli’s early work on *Männerbünde* from 1933, and several works by and about Dumèzil.<sup>20</sup> All three men still loom large in the work’s vast scholarly apparatus, but these are nonetheless meaningful excisions.

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<sup>18</sup> “Deciphering”, 134-35, our emphasis; Ranke, “Das Wilde Heer und die Kultbünde der Germanen” [1940] in Ranke, *Kleinere Schriften*, ed. Heinz Rupp and Eduard Studer (Bern: Franke, 1971), 380-408. Höfler dedicated great effort to rejecting Ranke’s “psycho-pathological” view; see his *Verwandlungskulte, Volkssagen und Mythen* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1973), e.g., at 284-85.

<sup>19</sup> Meuli, “Schweizer Masken und Maskenbräuche”, in *GS*, 177-250, 227-8n3.

<sup>20</sup> The other two omissions are interesting enough: one is “an excellent essay, worth consulting in full” (“Deciphering”, 135n27) by Bausinger, who would soon thereafter criticize Ginzburg’s

In a meanspirited and innuendo-laden 2007 attack on Ginzburg, whom he unironically styles “the *enfant terrible* of the historians’ craft”, Willem de Blécourt has highlighted the Bausinger-Ginzburg contretemps of the mid-1980s: though uncited in the “Charivari” essay, he argues, “Ginzburg was indeed familiar with [Höfler’s] work and the prickly exchange with Bausinger only lay at the surface of a sensitive issue that pervaded Ginzburg’s work on the *benandanti* and subsequently in *Storia*”, i.e., that “although from a Jewish and socialist background, as a young student Ginzburg had been inspired by German-speaking folklorists of the interbellum” not least Höfler but also Will-Erich Peuckert, Lily Weiser[-Aall], and others. “*Storia* can be seen,” de Blécourt argues, “as a recasting of the Germanic background of the *benandanti* and as showing Ginzburg’s awareness and subsequent attempt at an exorcism of the fascist influence on his work,” tendentiously yet nonchalantly collapsing the complex gulf between between “fascist influence” (and possession requiring exorcism!) and the influence of the scholarly work of fascist scholars.<sup>21</sup> De Blécourt refuses to take at face value the fact that Ginzburg, already in his 1965 preface to *I benandanti*, had mentioned the problematic (“racist”) ideology of such works, in particular Peuckert’s 1951 *Geheimkulte*. “Racist”, de Blécourt argues,

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“Charivari” for suppressing the debt to Höfler; the other (135n28) is Harald Spehr, “Waren die Germanen ‘Ekstatiker’?”, *Rasse* 3 (1936): 394-400, which argued against Höfler and others that the ancient Germans were not ecstatics, on which see Ginzburg, “Germanic mythology”, 139-140, as well as Bruce Lincoln, *Apples and Oranges: Explorations In, On, and With Comparison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 208n83, and Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science*, trans. Sonia Wichmann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 220-221, where Spehr is quoted, “Rapture, intoxication, *ekstasis*, the holy *orgia*, being beside oneself, and rooting about in the realm of others’ souls, these are all traits of the Near Eastern race soul; moderation, *metron*, *temperantia* are traits of the Northern race soul as well as the original piety of the Indo-European”.

<sup>21</sup> “The Return of the Sabbath: Mental Archaeologies, Conjectural Histories or Political Mythologies?”, in Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies, eds., *Palgrave Advances in Witchcraft Historiography* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 125-45, 138. De Blécourt has devoted several critical essays to Ginzburg’s work, including “A Journey to Hell: Reconsidering the Livonian ‘Werewolf’”, *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 2 (2007): 49-67.

apparently without irony, is not the word choice “one would expect from a Jewish position towards a nazi, but as an Italian would denote a German”. Moreover, de Blécourt’s laughable and patently unbelievable claim that, even by the publication of *Storia notturna*, Ginzburg “never seems to have discovered the fascist leanings” of Mircea Eliade is quickly disproved by a note in *Storia notturna* on “the Fascist and anti-Semitic experience” in the Romanian’s past.<sup>22</sup>

Long before de Blécourt’s attack or even the publication of Bausinger’s observations, though, Ginzburg had already published (in *Quaderni storici* in 1984) his remarkable essay “Mitologia germanica e nazismo”, in which he found agreement with Arnaldo Momigliano in identifying “clear traces of sympathy for Nazi culture” in Dumézil’s 1939 *Mythes et dieux des Germains*.<sup>23</sup> The right-wing politics implicated in Dumézil’s tripartite Indo-European model would soon be subjected to a withering critique by Cristiano Grottanelli, who had participated in Momigliano’s 1983 seminar on Dumézil, and who was before his death a friend of Bruce Lincoln, Ginzburg’s interlocutor in Ginzburg’s new 2020 book *Old Thiess*, a scholar who has himself devoted a great deal of attention to the problem of politicized scholarship in his own (and his *doktorvater* Eliade’s) field, the history of religions.<sup>24</sup> Grottanelli and Lincoln have expanded and enriched, but in some ways also tempered, the critique of Momigliano and Ginzburg. “Nazi” sympathies notwithstanding, Dumézil, an acknowledged *homme de droite*, had anyway been deeply influenced by Charles Maurras, the *intégraliste* and the organizer of the Catholic

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<sup>22</sup> “Return of the Sabbath”, 138. B x n3; NB xix and, especially, 174n8. For Eliade, see SN 183n70, E 203n70, and now also Ginzburg, “enMircea Eliade’s Ambivalent Legacy”.

<sup>23</sup> Translated as “Germanic Mythology and Nazism: Thoughts on an Old Book by Georges Dumézil,” in *Clues, Myth, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 126-145, 127, quoting Momigliano’s, “Premesse per una discussione su Georges Dumézil”, *Opus 2* (1983): 329-42, 333.

<sup>24</sup> Grottanelli, *Ideologie, miti, massacre: Indoeuropei di Georges Dumézil* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1993). On the friendship, see Lincoln, “In memoriam et gratitudinem”, *Lares* 76.2 (2010), 239-48.

monarchist political movement Action française. And his work had likewise made its mark on the French *nouvelle droite* of the 1970s, including on the ethno-nationalist Alain de Benoist and far-right Indo-Europeanist Jean Haudry among others.<sup>25</sup>

Ginzburg begins his inquiry into Dumézil with Marc Bloch's review of Dumézil's *Mythes et dieux*, dated April-June 1940, after the war had begun, which noted how discretely and nuancedly Dumézil had pointed out "certain tendencies, mythically warlike and mystically juvenile" present in the Germany of his own day but received in an evolved form "from the most ancient Indo-European past". The pairing "mythically warlike and mystically juvenile" in Bloch's review—like the Wild Hunt/Furious Army and the youth groups of Ginzburg's Charivari essay—points to a nexus of ideas found in Dumézil (*Mythes et dieux* has a chapter devoted to *Les Guerriers-Fauves*, in which Nazi paramilitary Sturmabteilungen are linked to the *einherjar* and *berserkir* of the Norse Eddas and Icelandic Sagas) but most clearly expressed in Höfler's *Kultische Geheimbünde*, the subject of five crucial pages of Ginzburg's "Mitologia germanica". Over these pages Ginzburg carefully builds a wall around Höfler, distinguishing his approach to *Mannerbünde* from the approaches of Lily Weiser (later Weiser-Aall) and Karl Meuli, who "preceded" him and whose work indeed deeply influenced Ginzburg. In Weiser "[s]uch elements as ecstasy, the ability to be transformed into animals, and the connection with the army of the dead always led back," Ginzburg notes, "to that warlike divinity whom the berserkir followed: Odin." This was true also of Höfler, who "went a step further" than Weiser by erasing the distinction between myths and rites, just as Margaret Murray had done with witches, and

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<sup>25</sup> Lincoln, "Dumézil's German War God" in Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 121-140, especially 124 and 260-61nn21-22.

assuming the latter (i.e., the rites of real bands of “flesh-and-blood youths” personifying the hosts of the dead) behind every scrap of evidence for the former (the mythic Wild Hunt). [Figure 3] Weiser had, however, in her own way also gone farther than Höfler was willing to go: to the trances of Eurasian shamans, to the feminine divinities sometimes at the head of the Wild Hunt, to the relationship of Perchta and Artemis, to fertility cults. “Behind the Germanic warrior associations Weiser glimpsed something vaster and more complex which was not exclusively martial nor exclusively Germanic,” something not unlike the original folkloric substratum of the sabbath described in *Storia notturna*.<sup>26</sup>

“Charivari” and “Présomptions” clearly speak to two progressive stages in an earlier, alternative vision of *Storia notturna*. We do not mean to suggest that Ginzburg disowned either work.<sup>27</sup> Yet over the long course of writing *Storia notturna*, Ginzburg’s conception of the work clearly changed, on smaller and larger points, even concerning its overall structure. At any given point in its development, to borrow a phrase, *Storia notturna* was already the result of a “long series of amalgamations, splits, forks, shifts, obscurations”.<sup>28</sup> In the absence of working drafts, it would be impossible to reconstruct these changes except in the imagination, as thought experiments, though not necessarily counterfactual ones. Another essay prepared in the same period, “The Witches’ Sabbat”, presented in 1982 at Cornell University and published in 1984, at least implies that the more strictly *événementielle* first part of *Storia notturna*, in which the

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<sup>26</sup> Ginzburg, “Germanic Mythology”, 127, 136-138.

<sup>27</sup> Especially not “Présomptions”, which he describes as providing an “overall synthetic picture of the various currents of research”, one that “anticipates some of the results of [*Storia notturna*]”; he even corrects a small error in the article, at least suggesting that he found the rest of “Présomptions” not urgently in need of revision; see E 27n47 and 152n114; SN xlii n47 and 129n115[sic].

<sup>28</sup> Salomone Luria, “TON YION ΣΟΥ ΦΠΙΕΟΝ (Die Oedipussage und Verwandtes)”, in *Raccolta di scritti in onore di Felice Ramorino* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1927), 289-314, 291.



origins of the idea of a secret plot against society as a whole (one applied first to lepers, then to Jews, Muslim kings, and ultimately witches), was at some point meant to be a separate book.<sup>29</sup> Naturally, over this long period of gestation, *Storia notturna* changed and naturally so did its author. One thing, for our purposes, is clear: between “Charivari” (published in 1981) and the piece on Dumézil, Weiser, and Höfler (“Mitologia germanica”, published in 1984), Ginzburg had begun—for reasons, as it were, “not only intellectual”—to establish a clear line between his ideas

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<sup>29</sup> Ginzburg, “The Witches’ Sabbat: Popular Cult or Inquisitorial Stereotype?”, in *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Steven L. Kaplan (Berlin and New York: Mouton-De Gruyter, 1984), 39-52, with a discussion, at 40 and *passim*, of “a forthcoming book” on the witches’ sabbath, and a note, at 49n11, on (another) “forthcoming book” on the 1321 lepers’ conspiracy in France and the events that prepared the way for it. Another path (mostly) not taken: Two sentences of *I benandanti* suppressed by Ginzburg in the 1983 English translation on “the problem of the origins of the diabolical sabbath”, suggested a possible hypothesis that “the inquisitorial scheme [of the sabbath] reflects, codifying them, the beliefs that sprouted in some areas of the ground of the dissolution of Catharism (from which the originally dualistic, then diabolical, elements would derive)”. Yet in his 1984 “Présomptions” essay Ginzburg remained emphatic on a similar point, that “the original doctrines of these groups [Waldensian heretics] had long been mingled with local folk traditions and dualistic beliefs of the Catharist type from East Central Europe, which lent themselves to being interpreted as devil worship. The intervention of inquisitors brought all these dispersed elements to the point of fusion, and so the sabbath myth was born [*C’est ainsi que naquit le sabbat*].” In *I benandanti* Ginzburg had cited, *apud* Joseph Hansen’s 1901 volume of *Quellen und Untersuchungen* for his earlier monumental history of the witch craze, some 1335 trials in Toulouse, trials which had once bewitched Jules Michelet and which were later proved by Norman Cohn and Richard Kieckhefer to be nineteenth-century forgeries. In *Storia notturna* Ginzburg did not abandon his earlier suggestion, “today generally rejected”, but reformulated it “cautiously” and briefly around different evidence, of Waldensians in Piedmont rather than Cathars in Toulouse, shrewdly concluding, “[i]n the light of these documents, which [the nineteenth-century forger] did not know, the non-existent trials at Toulouse appear like a singularly penetrating ‘critical forgery’”. Ginzburg, “Deciphering”, 132; “Présomptions,” 349, our emphasis; B 46-47 and 47n7, NB 185n87, citing Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witchhunt* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 126-46. See also Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300-1500* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 16-21. On the importance of these forgeries and their unmasking, see Laura Stokes, “Toward the Witch Craze”, in Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 577-89, 578-79. SN 54 and 60-61n74, E 79 and 86n74.

and Höfler's, even though "Présomptions" makes clear that the Wild Hunt (the first sequence of the first dossier) and male youth associations (bottom research thread in our diagram) still remained an important part of the overall picture. In this light, Ginzburg's reticent note in response to Bausinger makes perfect sense, as does his careful delineation, in a lengthy note in *Storia notturna*, of what can and cannot be saved in Höfler, a note pitched "against the tendency to accept or reject Höfler's thesis en bloc", where he addressed Höfler's three key points *separatim* and *seriatim*:<sup>30</sup>

| Höfler   | Ginzburg   |
|--|--|
| For Höfler the voluminous evidence he had collected on the Wild Hunt and the army of the dead "had (a) mythico-religious content"  | For Ginzburg, (a) "has good grounds" and "goes back at least to Grimm"   |
| "(b) expressed a heroic or bellicose myth, substantially Germanic"   | "inspired by the philo-Nazi orientation of Höfler", (b) "interprets the documentation in a unilateral fashion, isolating the bellicose themes from a wider context which also included themes related to fertility"  |
| and "(c) must be interpreted as rites practiced by organizations or secret groups of generally masked young men, pervaded by ecstatic fervour, who felt that they were impersonating the dead" | and (c) "exaggerates, also for obvious ideological reasons, the suggestive hypotheses of L. Weiser... reaching... completely absurd conclusions, dictated by the preconceived notion of systematically interpreting the descriptions of the processions of the dead and the forays of the werewolves as testimonies of real events". |

Readers of Ginzburg's 1982 "Preface to the English Edition" of *I benandanti* will doubtlessly see a parallel here with his careful discussion and bisection of the thesis of Margaret Murray's *Witch-Cult*, which he takes pains to divide into two parts, "(a) that witchcraft had its roots in an ancient fertility cult, and (b) that the sabbat described in the witchcraft trials referred to gatherings *which had actually taken place*", only the former of which Ginzburg's work "really

<sup>30</sup> Adapted from E 173 n2, SN 152 n2.

demonstrated ... even if unintentionally”.<sup>31</sup> Here again is the problem of distinguishing myths from rites.

### 3. Karl Meuli

Ginzburg’s long and complex intellectual encounter with scholars of the right provided a necessary but still hazy background for Bausinger’s critique of the “Charivari” essay and for De Blécourt’s unpleasant and ill-considered polemic. These would ultimately be matters of trifling importance were it not for the fact that this encounter also provides the crucial background for the changing shape of *Storia notturna*. Before returning to our thought experiment concerning a *Storia notturna* that never was, we must consider the arc of Ginzburg’s thought from “Charivari” to *Storia* from the vantage point of the finished work. From this perspective it is the work of Karl Meuli, rather than Höfler’s or certainly Dumèzil’s or Eliade’s, that is most revealing. Above we discussed a long note in “Prèsomptions” where Ginzburg lays out the lines of research that permitted him to make sense of the project. He concludes the note with these words: “there has been a failure to provide a global interpretation, *even on the part of someone like Meuli*, whose researches touched successively on the themes of processions symbolizing the dead, the shamans’ journeys to the beyond, and the mortuary identity recognizable in masks and witches (or *masche*)”.<sup>32</sup> It is Ginzburg who will ultimately provide the global interpretation. Meuli, having seen more pieces of the problem than anyone else, Ginzburg suggests, should have been able to do so, but failed. Ginzburg then is, at least in part, a continuator of Meuli, fulfilling the promise of his astonishing if not precocious piecework. A century ago the Jesuit comparatist

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<sup>31</sup> B xiii; and see also SN xvi, xix-xxii. Our emphasis.

<sup>32</sup> Ginzburg, “Deciphering”, 137nA4.

Henri Pinard de la Boullaye called Hermann Usener, Erwin Rohde, and other German scholars of the later nineteenth century who mixed philological and anthropological approaches “either ‘ethnologists of philology’ or ‘philologists of ethnology’”.<sup>33</sup> These are fitting labels for Meuli too, and rather than a “fascist influence” it seems to have been precisely this mixture that had bewitched Ginzburg in the period when he worked on *Storia notturna*. Yet the dividing line between the published *Storia notturna* and the imaginary version we are reconstructing also runs through Meuli.

Meuli’s scholarly output was indelibly marked by the period when it began, when the study of Germanic folklore was accompanied, in Leopold Schmidt’s famously evocative words, “by a real odor of corpses”. This was the era of the *Totenkultus*, the cult of the dead, as well as of the *Männerbund*.<sup>34</sup> It was an era defined by the work of Vienna philologist Rudolph Much’s students, scholars like Weiser-Aall, Höfler, Robert Stumpfl, and Richard Wolfram. Importantly for our subject here, the members of the “Much School” have been termed *ritualists* because they tended to believe that “the ecstatic cult always had priority over mythical legends”, in contradistinction to the *mythologists* following in the footsteps of Georg Hüsing, himself a student of Leopold von Schroeder, Much’s “antagonist” at Vienna.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Henri Pinard de la Boullaye, *L’Étude comparée des religions*, volume 1 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1922), 355-56.

<sup>34</sup> We paraphrase the excellent review of *GS* by H. S. Versnel in *Vigiliae Christianae* 32.3 (1978): 233-38, at 235, echoed in Versnel’s brilliant article, “Destruction, *Devotio* and Despair in a Situation of Anomy: The Mourning for Germanicus in Triple Perspective”, in *Perennitas: Studi in onore di Angelo Brelich* (Rome: Ateneo, 1980), 541-618, 577-78, where Versnel identifies “death” as Meuli’s central concern; see also 583n188. Schmidt’s view of Meuli is also considered in Niko Kuret, “Zu Karl Meulis Maskentheorie”, *Antaios* 11 (1970): 154-163, 155, which focuses too strongly on a Mannhardtian context for Meuli’s work.

<sup>35</sup> The phrase is Wolfgang Emmerich’s in “The Mythos of Germanic Continuity”, in James R. Dow and Hannjost Lixfeld, eds., *The Nazification of an Academic Discipline: Folklore in the Third Reich* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 34-54, 47-48. See also Olaf Bockhorn, “The Battle for the ‘Ostmark’: Nazi Folklore in Austria”, in Dow and Lixfeld, eds.,

In 1933 Meuli's long entry entitled "Maske, Maskereien" (later reprinted as "Die deutschen Masken") appeared in the *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, a grand encyclopedia and "cultural snapshot" of *Volkskunde* in the interwar years.<sup>36</sup> Meuli begins with a highly-concentrated résumé of "primitive" beliefs about masks. They represent the spirits of the "vengeful, evil, and rowdy (*geil*)" dead, who return at special times (*Maskenzeiten*) like year's end, who "kill, beat, and steal" and "guard the existing order through punishment and reprimand". Thus those who are masked at these times have an exceptional license. "Mask law (*Maskenrecht*) often abolishes all normal laws and does not recognize a higher authority over itself; it is spirit law (*Geisterrecht*)." And it is usually men's associations (*Männerbünde*) that have the exclusive right to mask; they do so secretly, and thereby "exercise a tyrannical lordship over non-members, women, slaves, and children".<sup>37</sup> Meuli finds similar practices among the Germans, indeed already among the Langobards, whom he calls "special Wotan worshippers". Rothair's Edict of 643 speaks of the disguised violence of the *walapauz*, which Meuli links to the primitive masker's right, and of the "*striga* which people call *masca*", which permits him to link the mask to the witch to the wild hunt. Masks are first the mesh nets in which corpses were

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*Nazification*, 35-55, and Bockhorn, "Von Ritualen, Mythen und Lebenskreisen. Volkskunde im Umfeld der Universität Wien", in Bockhorn, Wolfgang Jacobeit, and Hanniost Lixfeld, eds., *Völkische Wissenschaft. Gestalten und Tendenzen der deutschen und österreichischen Volkskunde in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1994), 477-526. On the antagonism of Much and von Schroeder, see Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols*, 180 but *passim* on all these matters.

<sup>36</sup> On the encyclopedia as "cultural snapshot", see Michaela Fenske, "The Undoing of an Encyclopedia: Knowledge Practices within German Folklore Studies after World War II", *Journal of Folklore Research* 47.1-2 (2010): 51-78.

<sup>37</sup> Meuli, "Maske, Maskereien", in *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, V (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1933), cols. 1744-1853; reprinted as "Die deutschen Masken" in *GS*, I, 69-162, 71-77, quotations at 75-77. Höfler would later expand the list of the excluded to "cowards, and the unfit", *Kultische Geheimbunde*, 250.

wrapped; then the evil spirits of the returning dead; then those (especially women, “witches”) who are themselves actually such evil spirits, and those (especially men) who wear hoods and masks to portray the evil returning dead.<sup>38</sup> The Wild Army, with masks depicting the returned dead, with animal disguises, and with weapons, ties together earlier and later German masking traditions and harkens unmistakably to the worship of Odin.<sup>39</sup> What Meuli sees as a modern disintegration of custom has permitted women to wear masks, for example at masked balls, but masks were traditionally for men and boys. The ancient importance of male associations to the Germanic peoples had been stressed already by Hermann Usener and especially Heinrich Schurtz in his 1912 *Alterklassen und Männerbünde* and later by Lily Weiser-Aall. The continued existence of such groups into the eighteenth century and even beyond had been demonstrated to Meuli’s satisfaction by studies on Swiss boys’ associations (*Knabenschaften*) by Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer, Gian Caduff, and others.<sup>40</sup> Just as they were among the primitives, such boys for Meuli were, facing outward, the main actors in war and, facing inward, “the carriers of social and festive community life”.<sup>41</sup> The charivaris and *Katzenmusik* of these boys also had two faces, as the Wild Army did, for the right to reprimand could be used mildly and jokingly, but it could also be used seriously to deliver a “devastating punishment”, and it was the latter that for Meuli explains the long survival of these customs.<sup>42</sup> Unsurprisingly Meuli concludes with the ecstatic

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-85.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-102.

<sup>40</sup> On these groups and scholars, see Norbert Schindler, “Guardians of Disorder: Rituals of Youthful Culture at the Dawn of the Modern Age” in Giovanni Levi and Jean-Claude Schmitt, eds., *A History of Young People in the West*, volume 1, *Ancient and Medieval Rites of Passage* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1997), 240-282, especially 248-50.

<sup>41</sup> “Die deutschen Masken”, 133-34.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-139.

frenzy associated with war and destruction, the *raptus melancholicus*, Javanese running amok, Nordic going berserk.<sup>43</sup>

Although Meuli was proud to point out that he had preceded Höfler, the “Maske” entry was very much a product of its time. Contemporaries like the Nazi folklorist Adolf Spamer saw Meuli’s work as cut from the same cloth as that of those in the Much school and those working for the SS Ahnenerbe.<sup>44</sup> Like Richard Wolfram, whose tentative early article on traditional “Germanic” sword dances, published in December of the previous year and in full awareness of Höfler’s work-in-progress, shared obviously in the same curious milieu as Meuli’s “Maske” entry:

The fact that all these dances are danced by men only is a certain proof of their ritualistic character... They are for the most part societies of youths... these men’s societies have warlike as well as ritualistic functions... The latter consists chiefly in the representation of the spirits of their ancestors... It is obvious that the people going round from house to house used to identify themselves with ...the Wild-Hunt. But the Wild-Hunt is no other than the army of the dead... [The Wild-Hunt described in myth was] nothing but the men's societies, representing the army of the dead and dancing and raging in ritualistic ecstasy like the masked dancers amongst savages... In the secluded Alpine Valleys of Austria, Bavaria and Switzerland the young men really do still go round in Carnival wearing masks and spreading terror... Yuletide, like Carnival, is particularly a time of the year when all the ghosts come to life.<sup>45</sup>

[Figure 4] In the midst of the war, however, Meuli would return to the same ground in a short 1943 book on Swiss masks and mask customs. There he would distinguish himself from Höfler, Wolfram, and the ritualists precisely on the question of myths and rites:

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 156-161.

<sup>44</sup> Adolf Spamer, “Usi e credenze popolari”, *Lares* 10 (1939): 289-306, 299-300.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Wolfram, “Sword Dances and Secret Societies”, *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* 1.1 (1932): 34-41, quotations at 38-40, slightly rearranged. For context, see Stephen D. Corrsin, “‘One Single Dance Form like the Sword Dance Can Open Up a Whole Lost World’: The Vienna Ritualists and the Study of Sword Dancing and Secret Men’s Unions between the World Wars”, *Folklore* 121.2 (2010): 213-33.

No myth is “so widespread, deeply rooted, and tenaciously held onto by most Germans” as that of the rides of the Wild Army, and no myth is so closely intertwined with customs.... the custom has determined, shaped, and enriched the myth, the myth the custom... Whether myth or custom, not to say cult, has precedence here is difficult to say.<sup>46</sup>

Unlike the Much School, Meuli is unwilling to give priority to cult and ritual or to legend; the correspondence of *Mythus* and *Brauch*, their inextricable intertwinement, is enough.

Not much later Meuli also published his astonishing 1935 article “Scythica”, which begins with Herodotus’s description (4:73-5) of a Scythian funeral and the accompanying vapor-bath where the smoke of hemp seeds is inhaled.<sup>47</sup> In it, in Ginzburg’s later admiring words, Meuli “for the first time, analyzed in depth both the shamanistic elements in Scythian culture and their reception on the part of Greek colonists residing on the banks of the Black Sea”, an analysis underway, unbeknownst to Meuli, just after his theory was being partly confirmed by Russian archaeologists. At a Pazyryk Iron Age site in the Altai Mountains, the bodies of Scythian chiefs and their concubines were found buried with hemp seeds and censers for burning them, itself a crucial datum in *Storia notturna*, whose cover in its first printing bore the striking image of a golden comb with Scythians on its handle, perhaps engraved by a Greek artisan in the fourth century BC and found in a tumulus in the Ukraine.<sup>48</sup> As creative as “Scythica” was, Meuli, early

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<sup>46</sup> *Schweizer Masken ... mit einer Einleitung über schweizerische Maskenbräuche und Maskenschnitzer*, (Zürich: Atlantis, 1943), reprinted in GS as “Schweizer Masken und Maskenbräuche”, 177-282, at 227, quoting Elard Hugo Meyer.

<sup>47</sup> Meuli, “Scythica”, *Hermes* 70.2 (1935): 121-176, reprinted with additions in Meuli, *GS*, II: 817-879.

<sup>48</sup> Ginzburg delivered a talk at the Symposium Karl Meuli in Basel in 1991, later published in the proceedings, ed., Fritz Graf, *Klassische Antike und neue Wege der Kulturwissenschaften* (Basel: Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Volkskunde, 1992), 111-128, and now definitively translated into English as Ginzburg, “The Europeans Discover (or Rediscover) the Shamans”, in Ginzburg, *Threads and Traces*, 83-95, 94. On Meuli and the Pazyryk dig, E 208 and 218nn4-5, SN 188 and 198-99nn4-5. On Ginzburg’s “Europeans Discover” and on Meuli, see the criticisms of Jan N. Bremmer, “Shamanism in Classical Scholarship: Where are We Now?”, in Peter Jackson, ed., *Horizons of Shamanism: A Triangular Approach to the History and Anthropology of Ecstatic*



in its pages, and in a passage that foreshadows *Storia notturna* aesthetically and methodologically, noted that he was not the first to glimpse the nature of the vapor-bath:

The connection with the cult of the dead, sweating, hemp smoke, and howling: all of it imperatively urges the assumption that this is not just an external cleansing but a religious act, whose element was ecstasy. [Erwin] Rohde had already suspected as much, but the meaning of the celebration eluded him. Today, thanks to comparative ethnological material we are in a position to solve the riddle.<sup>49</sup>

The reference is to a long footnote—itsself hinting toward ecstasy and employing comparative ethnological material—in the second volume of Rohde’s 1890-94 masterpiece *Psyche*, on Greek attitudes regarding the soul, where Rohde notes that Herodotus’s Scythians “must necessarily have gotten madly drunk” in their tightly sealed, cannabis-smoke-filled Yurt, adding “[t]his may have been a religious act” and presenting as a clear parallel religious intoxication in the “sweat lodges” of the indigenous people of North America.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4. Meuli and Eliade, Eliade and Dumézil

When he penned his famous book on shamanism, *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase*, in 1951, Mircea Eliade was well aware of Meuli’s most important articles, citing his “Maske” entry and his *Schweizer Masken*, as well as “Scythica” repeatedly. He too failed to provide the “global interpretation” demanded by Ginzburg, but he did elaborate a connection between Scythian shamanism and the Wild Hunt—linking “the ecstatic function of

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*Techniques* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2016), 52-78. For a detailed critique of Meuli’s approach, see also Bremmer, “Travelling Souls?: Greek Shamanism Reconsidered” in Bremmer, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife: The 1995 Read-Tuckwell Lectures at the University of Bristol* (London: Routledge, 2002), 27-41, especially 29-34.

<sup>49</sup> Meuli, *GS*, II, 820.

<sup>50</sup> Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen*, II (Tübingen and Leipzig: Mohr, 1908 [original 1894]), 17n1.

the vapor bath, combined with intoxication from hemp smoke, among the Scythians” with “Indo-European heroic myths... with their *furor*, their *wut*”—and one among shamanism, the *Männerbünde*, and wolves: “It is especially the secret societies based on a martial initiation—in so far as their ecstasies and frantic ceremonies can be termed ‘shamanic’—that developed and reinterpreted the mythology and the magic of the dog and the wolf”.<sup>51</sup> And the werewolf. A decade later, in an article called “Les Daces et les loups”, Eliade expanded at length upon the latter connection, adding little to a picture (of male brotherhoods donning wolfskins and wolf-masks and becoming wolves in initiatic rites, of “ritual or ecstatic lycanthropy”) already drawn in detail by Dumézil in *Mythes et dieux*, by Höfler in *Kultische Geheimbünde*, and so on. Little, that is, except gruesome “mythico-ritual” details—“young warriors, not satisfied with claiming the right to commit rapine and terrorize the community during their ritual meetings, were able to behave like carnivores in eating, for example, human flesh”—and the identification of another “martial brotherhood” of werewolves, the Dacians.<sup>52</sup> If death or ecstatic fury could respectively explain everything in Meuli and Höfler, Eliade too finds an “original source” for all the “religious complexes” swirling around the wolf, the youths, the masks, the initiations, namely “the religious universe of the primitive hunter”, “a universe dominated by the mystical solidarity between the hunter and the game”.<sup>53</sup> Here Eliade’s primary source is another of Meuli’s long essays, 1946’s “Griechische Opferbräuche”, the work for which he is now surely most famous.

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<sup>51</sup> *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask [Bollingen Series LXXVI] (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1964 [French original 1951], 476, 467.

<sup>52</sup> Eliade, “The Dacians and Wolves” [French original 1959], in Eliade, *Zalmoxis, the Vanishing God: Comparative Studies in the Religions and Folklore of Dacia and Eastern Europe* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 1-20, 7. The element of “initiation” certainly draws Eliade closer to Dumézil, and farther from Meuli and even Höfler.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

Written amidst the end of the Second World War, Meuli's essay is intensely alert to violence, full of anxiety if not profound ambivalence, regret if not guilt. A tone altogether missing from Eliade's paean to the carnivore. On the basis of a rich ethnographic literature on the hunting cultures of Siberia and elsewhere, Meuli argues that Greek sacrifice to the Olympian gods is nothing other than "ritual slaughter" and that it had its remote origin in elaborate prehistoric hunting rituals (of love and respect, of contrition, purification, repair, and regeneration) that expressed radical anxiety about killing and eating other living things. For Meuli, civilization and Christian ideas about the soul had made it nearly impossible to understand how close "the bond between the hunter and shepherd and his animals" was: "Animals and humans are beings of the very same kind, capable of appearing now in this, now in that form".<sup>54</sup>

In "Les Daces", however, Eliade also unmistakably points to another work of Dumézil, one that that influenced him more than *Mythes et dieux*, the work exposed for its Nazi themes by Ginzburg in "Mitologia germanica". Here is a crucial passage from "Les Daces": speaking of seasonal ceremonies involving young men in wolf masks, Eliade notes that

Ceremonies of this kind are still popular in the Romanian Balkans, especially during the twelve days from Christmas Eve to Epiphany. Originally they were ceremonies connected with the periodic return of the dead and including all kinds of animal masks—horse, wolf, goat, bear, and so on.<sup>55</sup>

Not surprisingly, Meuli had also staked out similar ground as early as January of 1927, when he delivered at a meeting of the Gesellschaft für Volkskunde the paper that would be published as "Bettelumzüge im Totenkultus, Opferritual und Volksbrauch" and which seems like a kind of

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<sup>54</sup> Meuli, "Griechische Opferbräuche", in *Phyllobolia* für Peter Von der Mühl zum 60. Geburtstag am 1 August 1945 (Basel: Schwabe, 1946), reprinted in *GS*, II, 907-1021, 948-949.

<sup>55</sup> Eliade, "Dacians", 14-15.

trial run (Meuli notes its incomplete, “sketchy character” in the first note) for the “Maske” entry of around five years later. Meuli begins with memories of his own schoolboy days in the Swiss village of Brunnadern, when he would witness “begging parades” or “processions” on New Year’s Eve. A group of boys would gather during the darkest hours of morning, awaken the villagers with the commotion of cowbells, and demand treats or coins. Though he did not participate, Meuli felt he was witness to an ancient, heathen sacrificial ritual. Employing surviving popular customs and ethnographic material from around the globe, he deciphered the “begging parade” along the lines we have already seen in the “Maske” entry: the beggars were once taking part in the rites of a secret all male youth group (*ein Geheimbund, eine Knabenschaft*); masked, they depicted the vengeful dead and were free to go about beating and robbing and destroying.<sup>56</sup> Jan Bremmer, in his 1983 book *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul*, found in “Bettelumzüge” what he thought was a fatal “reductionist assumption” typical of Meuli “whose whole scientific opus circled round the customs associated with the deaths of men and animals”. Meuli, he argues, “does not make clear how and why this transference from a mourning custom to a calendrical rite occurred, and why the transference did not go the other way around”.<sup>57</sup>

Dumézil, writing at roughly the same time, did not approach the problem first by way of mourning customs, but he arrived in roughly the same place. Among the many related terms found in Slavic Europe, in *Le Problème des Centaures* of 1929, he chooses the Polish plural term *gody*—which means a festival, feasting, and “le temps de Noël”—to stand for a whole

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<sup>56</sup> Meuli, “Bettelumzüge im Totenkultus, Opferritual und Volksbrauch”, *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde* 28 (1927/8): 1-38, reprinted in GS, I, 33-68, 33-4, 51, 54-55, 57-58.

<sup>57</sup> Jan Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 116-117n128.

assortment of kindred festivities and carnivalesque processions celebrated in the winter in Eastern Europe.

The days, in the season of these festivals, are very short and the nights very long... In the courtyard, the winds blow and storms reign with an incessant fury. It is as if all nature is unleashed. Everywhere there is an abundance of souls: some run in the air, in battle..., others come to look at men's homes and, lurking around the windows, ask for offerings. Young and old huddle around the burning stove; they fear the various Beasts: the Wolf, the Bear, the *Turoń*, etc. It is said that these are not real animals, but powerful men, subterranean spirits turned into animals.<sup>58</sup>

Eliade found the particular rituals of the Romanian Balkans elsewhere, but his view of the winter festivities was shaped profoundly by *Problème*, among his favorite winter reading even in the 1970s. “[T]he seasons when masquerades are held are filled with the memory of the dead”, he would have read there, “the famous Twelve Days [of Christmas] are still, in popular consciousness, devoted to their worship (*culte*)”, and he would have read too of the Mesnie Hellequin, the *Chasse fantastique*, the Wild Hunt.<sup>59</sup> In *Storia notturna*, Ginzburg notes that “Mueli’s conclusions [in “Bettelumzüge”] largely coincide with those reached almost contemporaneously by Dumézil, *Le problème des Centaures*” and that “this book, later disowned by its author because overly influenced by Frazer, still seems very much alive (*vivissimo*)”.<sup>60</sup> Both of Ginzburg’s points are undeniably true, but the scope of *Problème* is much grander than Meuli’s early work on begging parades. *Problème* tries to “prove that Centaurs, Gandharvas, and similar beings (to which the Latin Luperci are assimilated) are either monsters or human imitations of monsters of the New Year, for which they provide rituals”. This is the one-sentence summary of Momigliano, who adds (not without contempt) that Dumèzil’s best argument had

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<sup>58</sup> Georges Dumézil, *Le problème des Centaures: Étude de mythologie comparée indo-européenne* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1929), 11-12.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>60</sup> E 197n10, see also 198n13; SN 178n10 and n13.

come from J. Cuthbert Lawson who had tried, in 1910, to show that the Kallikantzaroi of Greek folklore, “the demons who control the days between Christmas and Epiphany” had descended from the ancient Centaurs.<sup>61</sup> The debt to Lawson, acknowledged by Dumézil, does not diminish the bold and ambitious agenda of *Problème* across a series of analogous Indo-Iranian, Greek, and Roman myths, myths that in Dumézil’s own words “give an important role to beings that bear if not identical then at least related names”—the core sequence is *Gandharva, Februo-, Kentauro*—“and that everywhere take forms still in use in the masquerades of modern Europe... myths and characters [that] are everywhere linked to the end of winter or the change of year, and to the festivals that were celebrated at those moments”.<sup>62</sup> By 1948’s *Mitra-Varuna*, Dumézil had certainly grown disenchanted with his earlier work—“I was still unable to confine myself to the essential thrust of the facts or to the truly telling and useful parts of my exegesis. ... Yet I regret nothing, not even those early errors, those first tentative gropings”—but he salvaged much of the core argument, and not only the linguistic one. Of the Luperci of Rome, for example, he writes:

The type of feral and brutal brotherhood... has already been illuminated by ethnography. It is one of those “men-only societies”—societies characterized by disguises, initiations and extraordinary magical powers... that merit, at least in part, the description “secret”.... The early Indo-European world could not have failed to possess this essential organ of collective life, an organ of which the Germanic world, in ancient times and even into the Middle Ages, certainly provides more than mere vestiges, and of which the winter and end-of winter “maskers” of modern Europe are, in part, a bastardization.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, “Georges Dumézil and the Trifunctional Approach to Roman Civilization”, in Momigliano, *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 289-314, 291; on Lawson, see Dumézil, *Problème*, 37, 52, 165-66, and *passim*.

<sup>62</sup> Dumézil, *Problème*, 52-53. A useful summary of *Problème* may be found in Wouter W. Belier, *Decayed Gods: Origin and Development of Georges Dumézil’s Idéologie Tripartite* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1991), 159-63.

<sup>63</sup> Georges Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna: An Essay on Two Indo-European Representations of Sovereignty*, trans. Derek Coltman (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 12, 28.

Just as Meuli himself remembered the begging processions in Switzerland, Dumézil's sources in *Problème* were often inspired by the first-hand recollections of folklorists of the popular festivities of their youths. The Czech ethnographer and cultural historian Čeněk Zíbrt, for example, carefully studied what Dumézil calls "*le jeu du Cheval*", finding a nearly pan-European popular phenomenon of winter or carnival time, by beginning only with a memory from his childhood of the *chození s klibnou* ("walking with the mare") procession near Tábor and an entry in Josef Jungmann's dictionary. One or more boys or young men dressed as a horse, usually made of straw and fabric (but sometimes involving harnesses and frames, and sometimes only "schematic"), usually with a guide and rider, walk through the village in search of gifts and treats.<sup>64</sup> [Figure 5] The horse is particularly important for Dumézil, not least because the centaur is the classical counterpart of the unruly young masked man of carnival. Indeed, centaurs may once, as early depictions suggested to him, have been "*monstres-masques* more or less left-handedly composed of human being and accessories".<sup>65</sup> [Figure 6] It was also important for Höfler, who had read with great interest a 1932 article—published in a festschrift for their shared habilitation supervisor Much—titled "Robin Hood und Hobby Horse" by Richard Wolfram. Wolfram was aware enough of Dumézil's *Problème* to cite it and note that the *Kentaurenproblem* was one he could not address, and he too drew together disparate material from Zíbrt and on the Kallikantzaroï and the Twelve Days, to make a case for the relationship of Robin Hood, leader of an outlaw *Männerbund* with initiation rites, to the hobby horse to Wodan to the Wild Hunt to processions of the dead. Hobby and Robin, Hood and Wodan are linked linguistically. Only the mechanical difference he sees between the Hobby Horse and the horse-

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<sup>64</sup> Dumézil, *Problème*, 14-23.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

headed stick keep him from making the next leap, to shamans and witches: “the name *Steckenpferdreiter* is not entirely happy, as in most cases it [Hobby Horse] is not a stick taken between the legs, which is known as a magical means of transport by shamans, witches, etc.”.<sup>66</sup>

### [Figure 7]

The *Männerbund* theme and that of annual renewal were both part of the same Gordian concatenation, which linked sometimes apparently dissimilar scholars and subjects. In this light, for example, it is unsurprising that both Martin P. Nilsson, the Swedish philologist, and Solomon Luria, the Russian classicist with strong ties to Italy—both of whom play an important role in Ginzburg’s narrative of *Storia notturna*’s development—explored *Männerbunde* in youthful works inspired by Heinrich Schurtz and ethnology.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, in a short essay on Achaemenid royal consecration dedicated to Karl Meuli for his sixtieth birthday, the Hungarian ancient historian Andreas Alföldi takes inspiration from the work of Weiser-Aall and Höfler on the one hand and Dumézil on the other, citing *Problème* and its more cautious recapitulation in *Mitra-Varuna*.<sup>68</sup> These works and themes often coincided and overlapped across a much wider political

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<sup>66</sup> Richard Wolfram, “Robin Hood und Hobby Horse”, *Wiener prähistorische Zeitschrift* 19 (1932): 357-374, 371-372 and 371n46 for the Dumézil citation. The leap is taken by Lucia Lazzarini in her wonderful essay “Arlecchino, le mosche, le streghe e le origini del teatro popolare”, *Studi mediolatini e volgari* 25 (1977): 93-155, 132-33, where she brings into contact the *Männerbünde* of the Much school (in particular through Robert Stumpfl) with the Shamanic hobby horse and the Wild Hunt, quoting also Anita Seppilli, *Poesia e magia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1972), 562, “la cavalcata sciamanica per l’aria è alla base della ‘caccia selvaggia”.

<sup>67</sup> Martin P. Nilsson, “Die Grundlagen des spartanischen Lebens”, *Klio* 12 (1908): 308-340, e.g. at 319-21; Solomon Luria, “Ein milesischer Männerbund im Lichte ethnologischer Parallelen”, *Philologus* 83 (1928): 113-136. For a statement of the importance of Luria and Nilsson, see SN xxix, E 15.

<sup>68</sup> Andreas Alföldi, “Königsweihe und Männerbund bei den Achämeniden”, *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde* 47 (1951): 11-16, at 15-16.



and ideological landscape, but, just as they did in Eliade, the nexus of all these ideas had been and would long remain powerfully attractive to scholars of the right.

## 5. Ginzburg and Lincoln

Ginzburg begins the long and important note on Höfler in *Storia notturna* by pointing out that Karl Meuli had been inspired by Höfler's *Kultische Geheimbünde*, but “subsequently took a more critical attitude”, just as he had taken pains to note in relation to Bausinger's critique that Meuli's own long 1933 encyclopedia entry (later the essay entitled “Die deutschen Masken”) had preceded Höfler's book. Although Ginzburg surely had no fascist demons to exorcise, as de Blécourt has preposterously claimed, we think Ginzburg's description of Meuli loosely applies also to Ginzburg himself, whose attitude towards Höfler's work (and to that of other related philologists, ethnologists, folklorists, and mythographers) grew more and more critical, not—to be sure—because he had suddenly and embarrassingly learned Höfler was a Nazi (a true absurdity) but because, in these years, he fundamentally rethought the relationship between myth and history while a more wide-ranging reevaluation of the “culture of the right” was underway in Italy.

It will be instructive, on this lattermost point, to also compare with Ginzburg's the case of the historian's interlocutor Bruce Lincoln, who openly rethought his own relationship to myth and history in a different way, and whose “conversion” account may be juxtaposed to Ginzburg's ethical turn. But this will first require understanding the importance of Höfler, a now otherwise minor figure, in the arc of Ginzburg's historiography. In what is now a well-known passage in the introduction of *Storia notturna*, Ginzburg argues that victims of witchcraft persecution lost their own cultural identity by means of the introjection of the hostile stereotype of the Sabbath,

and that in order to reconstruct that identity the historian must rely on “rare cases... fragments, relatively immune from distortions, of the culture that the persecution set out to eradicate”.<sup>69</sup> Ginzburg has more recently devoted a great deal of attention to the “case”, the anomalous case, and also to casuistry in ethical and methodological terms, but two particular “rare cases” help define the arc of the first half of Ginzburg’s career as an historian, namely, the benandanti of Friuli and the Livonian werewolf Thiess.<sup>70</sup> These two anomalous, though not unique, cases—the professed benandanti who claim to fight against witches for the fertility of the fields, and the self-confessed werewolf who claims werewolves fight witches for the same reason—are paired already in *I benandanti*, where Ginzburg, on the basis of the remarkable similarities between these geographically distant anomalous cases, suggests the past existence of a “single agrarian cult” diffused cross central Europe. A third parallel, also Livonian, which he found in the work of Kaspar Peucer, the story of a “werewolf” falling prostrate on the ground—as in a shamanic ecstatic trance—and later claiming to have then been fighting a witch, permits Ginzburg then to posit “a real, not an analogical, connection between benandanti and shamans”.<sup>71</sup> This connection will ultimately find its full explication a quarter century later in *Storia notturna*, where shamanism

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<sup>69</sup> E 13; SN xxiv.

<sup>70</sup> The essays in Carlo Ginzburg, *Nondimanco: Machiavelli, Pascal* (Milan: Adelphi, 2018) attest to this recent yet abiding interest in casuistry, as is made abundantly clear in Ginzburg, “Il caso, i casi: A proposito di *Nondimanco*,” online at Doppiozero, 12 aprile 2019, [www.doppiozero.com/materiali/il-caso-i-casi](http://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/il-caso-i-casi). For Ginzburg’s approach to casuistry more generally, see, among many possible examples, Ginzburg, “Preface,” in Ginzburg and Lucio Biasiori, eds., *A Historical Approach to Casuistry: Norms and Exceptions in a Comparative Perspective* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 12-20. We might even speak of a recent “casuist turn” in Ginzburg, though this too is part of the ethical reorientation announced by Molho, as is made clear in *Vittorio Foa, Carlo Ginzburg: Un dialogo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2003), 81-82.

<sup>71</sup> NB 30, 32; B 50-51.

serves as the tie binding the folkloric core of the witches' sabbath to its remote Eurasian origins.<sup>72</sup>

Here is where Höfler enters the picture. Hermann von Bruiningk first found Thiess's trial records in the archives of the high court of Dorpat (Tartu, Estonia), appending a full transcript to his 1924 article "Der Werwolf in Livland".<sup>73</sup> But it was Höfler more than anyone who assured the case's continuing relevance. The Nazi philologist learned of the case just after he had finished his habilitation at the University of Vienna under the supervision of Rudolph Much, and, at the last moment, he added an appendix to his 1934 *Kultische Geheimbünde* containing an abridged trial transcript and his own interpretation of the Thiess case.<sup>74</sup> In Ginzburg's telling he also learned of Thiess late (from where is a matter to which we shall return) and added him to (what he had thought was) the completed manuscript of *I benandanti*. Bruce Lincoln per his own recollection arrived at Thiess "around 1974", through Höfler, whose *Kultische Geheimbünde* had been recommended to him by his adviser Eliade, who "spoke of the book as brilliant and revelatory".<sup>75</sup> To Lincoln's recollection we can add the following details: (1) In July of 1974 Lincoln corresponded, in his capacity as editorial assistant for the journal *History of Religions* (edited by Eliade and others; its editorial office at the University of Chicago's Divinity School),

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<sup>72</sup> SN 114-15 and passim; E 136 and passim. See also the concluding sentences of Ginzburg's "Preface to the English Edition," dated 1982, to *NB*, at xv, with its explicit linkage between the unfinished work of *I benandanti* and the in-progress *Storia notturna*.

<sup>73</sup> Hermann von Bruiningk, "Der Werwolf in Livland und das letzte im Wendenschen Landgericht und Dörptschen Hofgericht i. J. 1692 deshalb stattgehabte Strafverfahren," *Mitteilungen aus der livländischen Geschichte* 22 (1924): 163–220, with the transcript at 203-20.

<sup>74</sup> *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen* (Frankfurt am Main: Moritz Diesterweg, 1934), I (but only one volume was produced), 345-57. The full transcript and some pages, 21-30 and 345-347, of *Kultische Geheimbünde* have been translated by Bruce Lincoln in Carlo Ginzburg and Bruce Lincoln, *Old Thiess, a Livonian Werewolf: A Classic Case in Comparative Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 33-45.

<sup>75</sup> Lincoln and Ginzburg, *Old Thiess*, 150, 153.

with Otto Höfler. Höfler had hoped Eliade could recommend American venues that might review his new book, *Verwandlungskulte, Volkssagen und Mythen*, in which Höfler defended *Kultische Geheimbünde* from the extensive criticism of Friedrich Ranke and further elaborated the *Männerbund* thesis. Lincoln provided a list of journals and ended the letter with a note of appreciation: “I am honored to have been of some service, and only hope that this has gone some small way to repay the great debt I owe you for the great contribution your scholarship has made to my study of Germanic and Indo-European religions.”<sup>76</sup> This was likely not a polite exaggeration. In his 1976 doctoral thesis, dealing comparatively with Indo-Iranian and East African “warrior bands” and cattle raiding, Lincoln would go on to acknowledge the foundational importance of Wikander’s “brilliant” *Der arische Männerbund* in the first sentence of the first chapter, and to also cite Höfler and Weiser-All on the “warrior bands”.<sup>77</sup> (2) Eliade had been asked by Helmut Birkhan to provide a contribution for a 75<sup>th</sup>-birthday festschrift in honor of Höfler. After Eliade missed the May 1974 deadline, Lincoln wrote Eliade in Paris in August of the same year to offer to translate or type a contribution for the volume. Ultimately published in 1976 the book contained Eliade’s “Some European Secret Cults”, in which Eliade discusses Ginzburg’s *I benandanti* and the Thiess case at significant length, viewing both ultimately through Höfler’s *Männerbund* lens.<sup>78</sup> It was also around this time that Eliade wrote his 1975 article “Some Observations on European Witchcraft”, similarly discussing *I benandanti*

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<sup>76</sup> Bruce Lincoln to Otto Höfler dated 19 July 1974 in the Mircea Eliade Papers [hereafter “Eliade Papers”], box 84, folder 11, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>77</sup> Bruce Lincoln, “Priests, Warriors and Cattle: A Comparative Study of East African and Indo-Iranian Religious Systems”, PhD dissertation, University of Chicago Divinity School, June 1976, 1, 207, 211, 223.

<sup>78</sup> Bruce Lincoln to Mircea Eliade dated 26 August 1974 in Eliade Papers, box 85, folder 16. Eliade, “Some European Secret Cults”, in *Festgabe für Otto Höfler zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Helmut Birkhan (Vienna and Stuttgart: Braumüller, 1976), 190-204.

and confirming Ginzburg's as-yet-unsubstantiated surmise about shamanism. The latter piece was published in Italian translation in January of 1982, and, later the same year, Ginzburg pointed in a kind of appeal to authority to Eliade's confirmation there at the conclusion of his English-language preface to *I benandanti*.<sup>79</sup> It is unclear if Ginzburg ever saw Eliade's "Cults", but Lincoln, early in his encounter with Höfler's work, had certainly already encountered Ginzburg and Thiess in relation to the *Männerbund* thesis shared by Eliade and Höfler. It took another decade for Lincoln to rethink his intellectual relationship to the ideas of both of them, and to his field of study. In 2020 he wrote (about himself in the third person): "Both [Lincoln and Ginzburg] found the old werewolf [Thiess] fascinating and sympathetic; both were profoundly dissatisfied with Höfler's analysis-cum-appropriation of him, although one of us (Ginzburg) realized this earlier than the other." Indeed Lincoln attributes his late realization, his conversion,<sup>80</sup> in large part to Ginzburg himself: "Reading Ginzburg's fierce critique of Höfler and Dumézil... alongside Arnaldo Momigliano's earlier article... was among the major influences that pressed Lincoln to rethink his earlier positive evaluation of their work and the paradigm of 'Indo-European studies' that had been a centerpiece of his academic training."<sup>81</sup> On

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<sup>79</sup> Eliade, "Some Observations on European Witchcraft", *History of Religions* 14 (1975): 149-72, 153-8.

<sup>80</sup> The word seems accurate: Elizabeth A. Clark, "Engaging Bruce Lincoln," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 17 (2005): 11-17.

<sup>81</sup> Bruce Lincoln, "Introduction" to *Old Thiess*, 1-8, quotations at 6 and 213n21. Lincoln had himself tentatively begun to focus on Dumézil's politicized scholarship as early as 1986 in a *Times Literary Supplement* review, published soon after Eliade's death, of a new book by Dumézil; this review has been reprinted as Lincoln, "Shaping the Past and the Future," in Lincoln, *Death, War, and Sacrifice: Studies in Ideology and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 231-243. There Lincoln mentions Momigliano's 1983 "Premesse per una discussione su Georges Dumézil" and the debate that followed the publication of the French translation of Ginzburg's "Mitologia germanica" in *Annales ESC*, 40.4 (1985): 695-715. Dumézil responded to Ginzburg in "Science et politique", *Annales ESC* 40.5 (1985): 985-89; and Ginzburg replied to Dumézil's defender Didier Erebou in "Dumézil et les mythes nazis", *Le Monde des débats* (September 1993), 22-23.

Lincoln's relationship with Eliade, who died in 1986, it must suffice to quote Wendy Doniger in the "Forward" to Lincoln's 1991 essay collection *Death, War, and Sacrifice*, which is dedicated to Eliade: "despite their grave political differences, Mircea often said (in print, too), that Bruce was his most brilliant student, while Bruce's enduring affection and respect for Mircea, both as a scholar and friend, is reflected in the dedication of this book."<sup>82</sup>

The pasts of Momigliano and Lincoln, albeit in very different ways and radically different contexts, were both entangled with the far right.<sup>83</sup> This is not true of Ginzburg. At the core of *Old Thiess*, which contains transcripts of two conversations, is a debate about Höfler and the interpretation of the Thiess case. For Lincoln, the proper perspective is, in the final analysis, political: the similarities between the benandanti and Thiess emerged, he argues, not from a shared shamanic background but from similar strategies, adapted to similar class and ethnic tensions, articulated in similar ways.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, Lincoln resolutely refuses to believe Ginzburg's declared methodological difference with Höfler (the problem of myths and rites), saying so openly in their 2 October 2017 conversation:

[A]t the level of method, there's no way to distinguish what you tried to do in [*Storia notturna*] from what Höfler tried to do in his book. There's an ethical and political difference, since a different imaginary informs the kinds of comparisons and hypotheses you generated, but a difference isn't present at the level of method.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Wendy Doniger, "Forward" to *Death, War, and Sacrifice*, ix-xi, at xi. "Affection and respect", and perhaps this is an understatement, are abundantly evident in the Eliade-Lincoln correspondence, Eliade Papers, box 85, folder 16.

<sup>83</sup> For Momigliano, see Riccardo di Donato, "Materiali per una biografia intellettuale di Arnaldo Momigliano, 1. Libertà e pace nel mondo antico," *Athenaeum: Studi di letteratura e storia dell'antichità* 83 (1995): 213-244, especially 222-28.

<sup>84</sup> Lincoln's argument is presented in chapter four of *Old Thiess*, 88-108, earlier versions of which he had delivered several times for public lectures and which was first published in French as "Le loup-garou et ses juges: Le drame de la resistance religieuse", *Asdiwal* 10 (2015):111-36.

<sup>85</sup> Lincoln and Ginzburg, *Old Thiess*, 181.

And this is only a more pugnacious and single-minded version of Lincoln's interpretation of what Ginzburg was doing, expressed a few days earlier on 30 September:

[Y]ou encountered [the Old Thiess case] in Höfler, where it was put to radically different use—politically, morally, socially, intellectually—and, I think, from your position, offensively so. ... And by putting Thiess in relation to the *benandanti*, rather than to the Norse werewolves, you effected a repositioning and redefinition that was intellectually appealing, while being attractive in more than just intellectual ways.<sup>86</sup>

Ginzburg's interpretation of the Thiess case here becomes a political act. The moral, social, and intellectual opprobrium spring forth from the political. Höfler's imaginary is understood by Lincoln in a political key: fascist or Nazi, with all that entails; Ginzburg's is too: he is of the Left, with all that entails. In a sense Lincoln's view (more than charitable towards Ginzburg) and that of Willem de Blécourt's (uncharitable to point of offensiveness) align on this point. Neither is willing to delve beneath the political surface (the level of labels and categories, of Right and Left, Nazi and not). For Lincoln, Ginzburg's project all along has been to save Thiess, reclaiming him and the werewolves from the Nazis. For de Blécourt, Ginzburg's whole project was inspired by Nazis, a fact he only later became aware of and tried to obfuscate. But what if the meaningful political difference between Höfler is better understood not at the surface, on what Lincoln and de Blécourt cast as political grounds, Left vs. Right, but at the level of historical method, where even profounder notions of the political are at stake?

## 6. Werewolves and Shamans

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<sup>86</sup> Lincoln and Ginzburg, *Old Thiess*, 154.

The zeal of the convert is a commonplace, and Lincoln the convert cannot sanction a politically ambiguous reading of Thiess, nor an apolitical critique of a reading. One interpretation that is missing from *Old Thiess*, and indeed mostly from *Storia notturna*,<sup>87</sup> is Karl Meuli's, offered at the end—somehow Thiess always arrives at the end—of his 1933 “Maske” entry, i.e., before Höfler had read von Bruiningk. Meuli begins on the same grounds as Ginzburg, quoting Thiess's remarkable claim that werewolves “drag out of hell the things the sorcerers brought there: animals, grain, and other produce”.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless Von Bruiningk's study provides Meuli with an old and reliable conclusion, that “wild raids by male societies (*männlicher ... Gesellschaften*) disguised as wolves were common” in the Baltics and, like other masked rites, assured abundance: a possible parallel with the “festivals” of the Neuri said, in Herodotus's skeptical account (IV.105), to annually transform into wolves. But there is more to the werewolf. Meuli had read in Wilhelm Hertz's 1862 *Der Werwolf* of a different sort of werewolf, from “another, far weirder area of legend, namely the ghostly werewolf”, the werewolf that returns from the dead like a vampire. That werewolves in Thiess's confession go to and from the underworld provides a “most desirable clarity” for Meuli: wolf masks too are spirit masks, masks representing the spirits of the dead. Berserkers and their wolfskin-clad kin felt themselves transformed into bears or wolves, yet

We intellectuals would do well to remember that there was something numinous, to use a modern catchphrase, about these fierce animals; and that when experiencing battle fury (*Kampfwut*) a *numen* was indeed felt, namely a numen of

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<sup>87</sup> Ginzburg notes that Meuli had interpreted Thiess “in the ritual rather than mythical sense”; E 202n60, SN 182n60. See also the interpretation, only hinted at by Ginzburg, of Hans Dietschy, “Der Umzug der Stopfer, ein alter Maskenbrauch des Bündner Oberlandes”, *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde* 37 (1939/40): 25-43, 36-37 and 37n1, who highlights the territorial aspects of the masking practices, with clashes between maskers from adjacent areas.

<sup>88</sup> Translated by Lincoln in *Old Thiess*, 16, 18.



the world of spirits and of the dead, as the name of the battle god *Wuotan* shows. In this context we may recall also the *feralis exercitus* of the Harii...<sup>89</sup>

Ritual continuity between the Harii, “an army of ghosts” in Tacitus’s phrase, the cult of Wotan, and the Wild Hunt was well-established in the Much School.<sup>90</sup> Meuli here is at his closest to Höfler. Following the etymological allusion, the name Wotan derived from *Wut* (frenzy or ecstasy), Meuli would later add (where there was no citation in the original) a brief, emphatic note pointing to Höfler’s pages on the not-just-metaphorical reality of “the wolfish frenzy of the *Wut*-God Óðinn”, where Höfler foreshadows and himself explicitly points to the key pages of *Kultische Geheimbünde*, its subject announced already in the opening line of the book’s foreword as “Germanic death myths and cults of ecstatic emotion” and “warlike-political associations rooted in ancient times that remain alive into later epochs”.<sup>91</sup> On these essential pages, Höfler realizes that ecstasy is the key to solving the maze-like mystery of Odin, a figure so multifaceted that he once seemed like a collective name for diverse mythological functions.

From this perspective, a whole range of features, which otherwise required such a considerable amount of long-spun auxiliary structures to explain, become comprehensible at one stroke (*mit einem Schlage*): the god of ‘Wut’ (think of Adam of Bremen’s ‘*Wodan, id est furor*’) is lord of the dead—because the dead

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<sup>89</sup> *GS*, I, 160-61, quoting Wilhelm Hertz, *Der Werwolf: Beitrag zur Sagengeschichte* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1862), 88.

<sup>90</sup> *Germania*, trans. M. Hutton, in Tacitus, *Agricola-Germania-Dialogus* [Loeb Classical Library 35] (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970 [1914]), 203; Rudolf Much, “Vagdavercustis”, *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 55 (1917): 284-296, 287, and especially Lily Weiser[-Aall], *Altgermanische Junglingsweihen und Männerbünde: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen und nordischen Altertums- und Volkskunde* (Baden: Konkordia Bühl, 1927), 31-43.

<sup>91</sup> Höfler, *Kultische Geheimbünde*, 197 and vii. In these phrases one can see why Höfler’s work appealed especially to the SS. Hans Peter Hasenfratz, “Der indogermanische ‘Männerbund’”, *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 34 (1982): 148-163, especially 162-63, with the context of Josef Ackermann, *Heinrich Himmler als Ideologe* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1970), 53-71. Walter Wüst, in charge of the SS Ahnenerbe, and Himmler himself intervened to help Höfler’s career; see Nina Schmid, *Otto Höfler und die Universität München*, master’s thesis, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (Munich, 2002), 47-52. See also Rita Thalmann, *Frausein im Dritten Reich* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1984), 73-112, for the gender dimension of this ideology.

are portrayed in ecstasy. This god of the dead loves masking so much that this is almost a major feature of his existence, inasmuch as the cult of the dead of the male associations (*Totenkult der Männerbünde*) is almost everywhere associated with disguise and the use of masks.<sup>92</sup>

Ecstasy even explains the fertility connection, largely sidelined in Höfler, for “folklore shows us that the power to awaken the forces of nature was also ascribed to the ecstatic ‘Wut’ of the male associations”.<sup>93</sup> Höfler here is at his closest to Ginzburg, but, paradoxically, also at his farthest from him. The distance shortens or grows along the spectrum of meanings of ecstasy, not, to be sure, along any pre-ordained political spectrum.

Among the four lines of research outlined in “Présomptions”, and shown in the schematic above, the first comprises the “interpretation of the werewolf myth as a journey into the beyond, formulated by Wilhelm H. Roscher in a basic essay ... in which, following Grimm, the parallel with the witches was taken up, and also that with the Siberian shamans through the work of the psychiatrist R[udolf] Leubuscher...”<sup>94</sup> The depiction at the Tomba Golini in Orvieto of Aita, the Etruscan Hades, apparently wearing the head of a wolf like a cap over his own head, provides a crucial link for both Ginzburg in *Storia notturna* and the nineteenth-century classicist Roscher.<sup>95</sup>

[Figure 8] Both Meuli in his “Maske” entry and Höfler in *Kultische Geheimbünde* were well aware of and cited Roscher’s long 1896 essay, and both used it to formulate a theory about wolves (and werewolves) as spirits of the dead, spirits associated with ecstasy and ecstatic

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>94</sup> “Deciphering”, 136nA1.

<sup>95</sup> Roscher, “Das von der ‘Kynanthropie’ handelnde Fragment des Marcellus von Side”, *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der königlich Sachsische Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 17.3, printed as a booklet (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1896), 44-5; SN 135 and 154n24; E 158 and 175n24.

possession, with war and indeed with rabid frenzy.<sup>96</sup> Meuli, for his part, returned to consider Roscher again in his 1955 article “Altrömische Maskenbrauch”, this time focusing crucially on the wolf-hooded Hades, linking him to the *berserker* and *ulfhednar* who don bear- and wolfskins in combat, and referring back to his and Höfler’s early work, “in this way the warrior receives the admired fighting virtues of the... numinous animals, or he transforms into them,” with a reference to pages in *Kultische Geheimbünde* where Höfler muses on the metamorphic inability of primitive man to distinguish between *Hülle* and *Gestalt*, covering and form, disguise and reality. When a primitive person “puts on a ghostmask or a bearskin, he is a ghost or a bear, not only in the eyes of others, but... even according to his own feelings”.<sup>97</sup>

It is another remarkable passage in Kaspar Peucer that draws together Roscher, Leubuscher, and the shamans.<sup>98</sup> In Lappland, Peucer relates, one could learn of matters as far as three hundred miles away by going to a magician who, having performed some preparatory ceremonies, falls into a motionless and senseless trance only to emerge twenty-four hours later, “as if from a deep sleep” when his soul returns to his body, with detailed answers.<sup>99</sup> To this sixteenth-century account of “probably artificially-produced ecstasy”, the liberal reformer and psychiatrist Leubuscher appends a fascinating footnote in his 1860 book on werewolves. Noting that “similar observations” to those related by Peucer had recently been made by the Russian

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<sup>96</sup> Meuli, *GS*, I, 157nn6-7, citing a passage dealing with rabies; Hofler, *Kultische Geheimbünde*, 43n149.

<sup>97</sup> Meuli, *GS*, I, 269-70 and nn5-6; Hofler, *Kultische Geheimbünde*, 170-71.

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in another context at SN 149, E 170. The nature of Ginzburg’s use of Peucer has been described by Matteo Duni, “‘What about some Good Wether?’: Witches and Werewolves in Sixteenth-Century Italy”, in *Werewolf Histories*, ed. Willem de Blécourt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 121-141, 133 and 140n40, as acknowledged by Ginzburg, “Conjunctive Anomalies: A Reflection on Werewolves”, reprinted in Ginzburg and Lincoln, *Old Thiess*, as chapter 5, 109-126, 253n14.

<sup>99</sup> Casparus Peucerus, *Commentarius de praecipuis generibus divinationum* (Wittenberg: Iohannes Crato, 1560), 143r.

explorer Fyodor Matyushkin, as part of Ferdinand Wrangel's arctic expedition in 1820, Leubuscher relates the frightful details (falling prostrate, convulsions, tremors, etc.) of Matyushkin's account of a shamanic trance.<sup>100</sup> What directly links Peucer and Matyushkin, though only hinted at by Leubuscher, is the shaman's ability to learn information at a great distance, not unlike the "second sight" of the British Isles. Cold and wet near Verkhoyansk, Matyushkin, in his own account, had found himself willing to take refuge in the ominously-named Devil's Yurta in Alar Süüt, the "Murder Forest" reputedly haunted by the ghosts of Russians slain with the aid of Shamanic incantations. There, in exchange for brandy and tobacco, a shaman dramatically enters a trance and learns details of the far-away expedition: "He answered every question I asked," Matyushkin wrote a friend in St. Petersburg, "a little in an oracular style, but with a kind of certainty from which one could have concluded he was quite familiar with the main purpose as well as with the secondary circumstances of my journey".<sup>101</sup> Leubuscher had himself found Matyushkin's account in the 1830 *Geschichte der Seele* by Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert, the naturalist and physician perhaps now best known for his earlier *Symbolik des Traumes*, which influenced E.T.A. Hoffmann and Freud.<sup>102</sup> In *Storia notturna* Ginzburg expresses a curious kind of scholarly bemusement: "Despite a reference by Roscher to the passage in Leubuscher... the link between shamans and werewolves has been largely ignored by the subsequent literature".<sup>103</sup> The note on the genesis of werewolf beliefs is, indeed, remarkable: "naïve belief sees the dream world as reality," Roscher writes, and it is in

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<sup>100</sup> Rudolf Leubuscher, *Ueber die Wehrwölfe und Thierverwandlung im Mittelalter: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Psychologie* (Berlin: Reimer, 1850), 39-40n1.

<sup>101</sup> Matyushkin's letters were printed in the Tübingen daily *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände*, nn. 294-297, 9-12 December 1829, quotation at 1178.

<sup>102</sup> Schubert, *Die Geschichte der Seele* (Stuttgart and Tübingen: Cotta, 1833), 393-96.

<sup>103</sup> SN 158n74 and E 180n74 cite n52, which generally points readers to examples of lycanthropy in Leubuscher and Hertz, instead of n54.

this world of dreams that werewolf transformations occur, but the same is also true of witches, indeed, “according to German popular belief, witches only go on their ride in spirit (*als Seelen*), while their bodies remain deeply asleep at home”. Among other sources, Roscher cites Leubuscher’s footnote about shamanism and a very strange passage in Jacob Grimm’s *Deutsche Mythologie*.<sup>104</sup>

## 7. Ecstasy

The central hypothesis of *Storia notturna* appears, clearly and concisely stated if not stripped bare (“The folkloric nucleus of the Sabbath—magic flight and metamorphosis—seems to derive from a remote Eurasian substratum”), near the book’s very center (II.2.14), as a sort of fulcrum between its less and more conjectural halves. Ginzburg then recreates, over the essential pages that follow, how “a connection of this order” had already been glimpsed by both Pierre de Lancre and Jacob Grimm, indeed by Grimm in the very passage cited by Roscher in his astonishing footnote on the genesis of lycanthropy. In the long footnote in “Présomptions” Ginzburg had already given De Lancre and Grimm pride of place together, listing them first among the “fundamental contributions” to his discovery, the discovery that Meuli, although he had many of the necessary pieces, failed to make. “It is not surprising,” Ginzburg writes there, “that the analogy... pointed out by judge Pierre de Lancre... should have escaped the notice of later researchers. But the brilliant hypothesis expressed by Jacob Grimm in an interrogative sentence... provides sustenance, often indirectly” for the four lines of research discussed above.<sup>105</sup> If we are correct about Ginzburg’s decision to abandon the Wild Hunt as the key for

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<sup>104</sup> Roscher, “Kynanthropie”, 21n54, citing Grimm in the third edition of 1854, at 1036.

<sup>105</sup> “Deciphering”, 136nA.

deciphering the Sabbath in exchange for Shamanic ecstasy, though, the narrative (partly quoted below) that he presents in *Storia notturna* of Grimm's connection now takes on new meaning:

In his *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835) Jakob Grimm traced the inventory of a mythical tradition largely hinging on the 'wild hunt' [*caccia selvaggia*] and the figures who led it. One of the threads offered the reader to orient himself in the enormous accumulation of material was the hypothesis of continuity between pagan beliefs and diabolical witchcraft. At the end of a section devoted to cannibalistic witches, this hypothesis was formulated in an especially dense, almost cryptic fashion. With an abrupt leap, Grimm proceeded to refer to that other belief, equally ancient and recurrent in a large number of legends, according to which the soul can abandon the body of a sleeping person in the form of a butterfly... Might not all this be linked, Grimm asked, on the one hand to the metamorphoses of witches into mice [*alle metamorfosi delle streghe in topi*], on the other to the bridge, narrow as a thread, which the soul must cross to reach the other world? With this question, which seems addressed to himself rather than to the reader, Grimm identified, in the flash of a fading bolt of lightning [*nel bagliore di un lampo che si spegne*], the same overwhelming [*sconvolgente*] connection that had come to Pierre de Lancre, persecutor of witches in Labourd, two centuries earlier. In all probability the latter was an unconscious convergence. De Lancre had apparently been speaking of something else entirely: of werewolves, of Diana's followers, of Laplandic magicians. But the unifying element of the two analogical series was the same: ecstasy.<sup>106</sup>

An abrupt leap. The dying glow of a lightning flash. A question Grimm addresses to himself. An overwhelming connection. Ecstasy—as in Höfler's key passage quoted above—as the suddenly arrived at key to making sense of a hitherto insoluble, multifaceted problem. If we look carefully at Grimm's "dense, almost cryptic" pages, however, will we find that Ginzburg has imbued this moment with perhaps too much *Sturm und Drang*? Here is the question Grimm actually asked, on page 906 of volume 2 of the fourth (posthumous 1875-1878) edition of *Deutsche Mythologie*, the text cited by Ginzburg: "Hängt damit jenes mäuse machen der hexen zusammen und die schmale von der seele auf dem weg nach der unterwelt zu überschreitende dratbrücke?" Grimm is, at least explicitly, asking less about metamorphoses into mice (*le metamorfosi delle streghe in*

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<sup>106</sup> E 136, 139; SN 114-15, 117.

*topi*) than about mouse-making, the production of mice by witches (which he will discuss on page 912). And by *drätbrücke* he has, at least first, in mind a particular bridge he has discussed earlier (on page 696), namely the “bridge of dread, no brader [broader] than a thread” from the famous Lyke Wake Dirge, which Grimm had found in William Thoms’s 1839 *Anecdotes and Traditions*, a work itself inspired by Grimm’s own earlier studies.

Before making the connection to ecstasy, Grimm discusses the wider legend of animals coming out of the mouths of sleeping men and women, adding, “in even more recent accounts, though, [this legend] is applied to devil’s-brides [witches] who have fallen asleep, out of whose mouth runs a cat or a red mouse, while the rest of the body lies fixed in slumber (*in schlummer erstarrt*)”. Since Grimm had finished talking about cannibalistic witches at the middle of page 905 and will turn back to witches’ broomsticks and broomstick riding at the bottom of page 906, the “abrupt leap” that so struck Ginzburg appears to be a short digression tied to the surrounding text by the reference to cats and mice issuing out of witches. On this matter Grimm refers to three legends from the Brothers’ earlier collection *Deutsche Sagen* and, oddly, adds a note to Johann Christoph Ettner’s pseudonymous 1715 *Des Getreuen Eckarths Unvorsichtige Heb-Amme*, “Loyal Eckarth’s Careless Midwife,” a huge medical novel dealing with female anatomy and reproduction. There the mouse that escapes from a woman’s mouth is equated with the displaced or wandering uterus of gynecological myth and the mouse’s travels with acute *passio hysterica* or *hūsterike pnix* (uterine suffocation or strangulation), then called in German *bermutter* or *bärmutter* (like *gebärmutter* also a term for the uterus itself) and associated with a number of different animals.<sup>107</sup> In Ettner, a mouse exits a woman’s mouth and returns home only

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<sup>107</sup> Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, ed. Elard Hugo Meyer, vol. 2 (Berlin: Dümmler, 1877), 905-06.

after a sword is laid down like “a bright iron bridge (*eine helle eiserne Brücke*)” for the mouse to cross over the river into a nearby field.<sup>108</sup> This was a meaningful connection for Grimm, so much so that he repeated it again: the word “*bermutter*, which is used for colic, really denotes *die mutterkrankheit*, and it is not only represented as a toad... but also as a mouse that comes running out of the body, and a sword is laid across the river for it according to the popular belief (*volks glauben*) outlined above.”<sup>109</sup> In their *Deutsches Wörterbuch* the Grimm brothers define *mutterkrankheit* as “krankheit der gebärmutter,” sickness of the uterus, and quote a different curative from Andreas Gryphius’s 1663 play “Horribilicribrifax Teutsch”, where the old matchmaker Cyrilla tells the pedantic schoolmaster Sempronius that “nutmeg (*Muskaten*) in warm beer is good for *die mutterkrankheit*”.<sup>110</sup> The Grimms similarly defined other related terms—*Mutterbeschwer*, *Mutterbeschwerde*, *Mutterbeschwerung*, etc.—as “*hysterica passio*” amidst a hazy nexus of female ailments including uterine pain and bleeding.<sup>111</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly Grimm still had Ettner’s *Careless Midwife* at hand when he penned the sentence in which Ginzburg sees Grimm suddenly and shockingly finding the connection to ecstasy: “Such a state of inner ecstasy, when the body lies in rigid sleep, our old speech designates by *irprottan* (raptus), i.e., *entzückt*”, to which is added a note, “*hinbrüten* (ecstasis) der zauberinnen. Ettners Hebamme p. 226.”<sup>112</sup> The subject here is the brooding or rapture—“das hinbrüten, zu lateinisch *ecstasis*, entzücken”—accompanying *Mutterbeschwerung*, an ecstasy that “some

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<sup>108</sup> Ettner, *Des Getreuen Eckarths Unvorsichtige Heb-Amme*, (Leipzig: Johann Friedrich Braun, 1715), 94-95.

<sup>109</sup> Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, vol. 2, 970.

<sup>110</sup> *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*, vol. 6 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1885), col. 2819. Kinbote’s (Nabokov’s) magnificent pun, “I do not know if it is relevant or not but there is a cat-and-mouse game” in the sentence, might be relevant at this point; Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (New York: Vintage, 1989 [1962]), 93.

<sup>111</sup> *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, col. 2813.

<sup>112</sup> Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, vol. 2, 906.



people mix with the brooding of witches (*einige vermischen diese ecstasin mit dem hinbrüthen der zauberinnen*),” who are believed to travel to the Blocksberg, supposed site of the infamous Walpurgisnacht witches’ sabbath, while in this trance state.<sup>113</sup>

In short, the sword over the river as a cure for *mutterkrankheit*, represented by the mouse wandering out of the body, is in Grimm the silent referent that links the “bridge of dread” to the witches. It is a point repeated by Grimm. All of this is to suggest not that Ginzburg has missed the point of Grimm’s digression, not at all, but that Grimm’s notion of ecstasy—etymologically something like “standing outside oneself”—is complex and capacious, as well as gendered, and understood in relation to phenomena not strictly related to ecstasy in the shamanic sense. A similarly vast range of meanings also exists for *Wut*, as evidenced by the enormous, forking entry in the Grimms’ dictionary. Without any recourse to Grimm, though assuredly in the shadow of Dag Strömbäck’s 1935 *Sejd*, which tied the Norse ritual magic *seiðr* to Lappish shamanism, the Norwegian folklorist Ronald Petter Grambo also linked the “migratory” folkloric tradition of the mouse from the sleeper’s mouth crossing over a sword bridge, best known in the tale told of the Frankish king Guntram, and some kinds of Norse magic to sleep as an ecstatic technique in Eurasian shamanism.<sup>114</sup> And for Grimm as for Ginzburg, the best possible example (“das wichtigste aller beispiele”; “l’esempio, sublime tra tutti”)<sup>115</sup> of the soul leaving the body as an animal comes from Old Norse myth, in the seventh chapter of the *Ynglinga saga*, the first saga in Snorri Sturluson’s thirteenth-century compilation *Heimskringla*, where we read:

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<sup>113</sup> Ettner, *Heb-Amme*, 226-27.

<sup>114</sup> Ronald Petter Grambo, “Sleep as a Means of Ecstasy and Divination”, *Acta ethnographica Academiae scientiarum Hungaricae* 22.3 (1973): 417-425.

<sup>115</sup> SN 117, E 139; Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, 906. An example that did not appear in the first edition of *Deutsche Mythologie*, subtly altering the meaning of the whole passage.

Óðinn skipti hömum; lá þá búkrinn sem sofinn eða dauðr, en hann var þá fugl eða dýr, fiskr eða ormr, ok fór á einni svipstund á fjarlæg lönd, at sínum erendum eða annarra manna.

Óðinn changed shapes. Then his body lay as if it was asleep or dead, while he was a bird or an animal, a fish or a snake, and travelled in an instant to distant lands, on his own or other people's business.

The context of this passage within the Ynglinga saga, not noted by Ginzburg, is also worth describing. Immediately before it:

Óðinn could bring it about that in battle his opponents were struck with blindness or deafness or panic, and their weapons would cut no better than sticks, while his men went without mail and were as wild as dogs or wolves, biting their shields, being as strong as bears or bulls. They killed the people, but neither fire nor iron took effect on them. That is called berserk fury [*berserksgangr*].

And soon after it:

[S]ometimes he [Óðinn] awakened the dead from the earth or sat himself under hanged men. Because of this he was called *draugadróttinn* ("lord of ghosts") or *hangadróttinn* ("lord of the hanged").<sup>116</sup>

For Höfler, as we have seen, ecstasy is what ties together these disparate elements of Óðinn/Wotan. Writing before Strömbäck, Höfler was nonetheless aware of Óðinn's shamanic qualities qua shamanic qualities largely through the work of Uno Holmberg, especially his 1922 *Der Baum des Lebens*, and of Rolf Pipping: the god's sacrifice of himself to himself by hanging on Yggdrasil is a shamanic (or "Asiatic") initiation ritual; his horse Sleipnir a shamanic horse. The shaman's costume is even linked to the mask frenzy (*Maskenraserei*) of "the ecstatic

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<sup>116</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, vol. 1: *The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason*, trans. Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2011), 10.

Perchtenlaufen, the Schembart carnival, and their relatives”.<sup>117</sup> This might explain how Höfler remained Eliade’s source on Germanic shamanism and “techniques of ecstasy” in *Chamanisme*, since he links (even if tenuously) the *berserksgangr* with the *furor teutonicus* with the shamanic trance and even with the continuing masked rites of the *Männerbünde* at Christmas and carnival.

The critique of Eliade’s *Chamanisme* presented by Éveline Lot-Falck, recapitulated by Ginzburg, is undoubtedly true: Shamanism is vague and undefined and “serves as a pretext for Eliade to regroup and illustrate some of his favorite themes”.<sup>118</sup> Like Shamanism, ecstasy itself seems a magnet, capable of attracting and arraying in a seductive pattern disparate filings of iron otherwise fated to blow away in the wind. In Dumézil’s *Mitra-Varuna*, for instance, the speed of the centaurs, Gandharvas, and Luperci “takes on its full meaning when one recalls that the dizzying intoxication of speed—among the shamans of Siberia and on our own Grand Prix circuits—is just as much a stimulant, an intoxicant... as is alcoholic intoxication, erotic passion or the frenzy stirred by oratory”.<sup>119</sup> Even Höfler, in more dogmatic moments, knew that ecstasy encompassed too much—“the ecstasy of the Furious Army is not sexual, but is instead a battlemadness [*Kampfesraserei*]”—and could be better understood by means of conceptual dismemberment.<sup>120</sup> Faced with such a magnetic force, must one find, as a counterpoint to

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<sup>117</sup> Höfler, *Kultische Geheimbünde*, 234-35, 12. For context, see Stefanie v. Schnurbein, “Shamanism in the Old Norse Tradition: A Theory Between Ideological Camps”, *History of Religions* 43.2 (2003): 116-138. Dumézil was more skeptical about Pipping’s shamanic arguments, perhaps to restrict the presence of non-Indo-European elements; *Gli dèi dei germani: Saggio sulla formazione della religione scandinava*, trans. Bianca Candian (Milan: Adelphi, 1974 [1959 French original]), 54.

<sup>118</sup> Éveline Lot-Falck, “Le chamanisme en Sibérie: Essai de mise au point”, *Asie du sud-est et monde insulindien* 4.3 (1973): 1-10; others have criticized Eliade for having an overly restrictive idea of Shamanism, see, e.g., Ernesto de Martino, reviews of three works by Eliade, *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 23 (1951/52), 148-155, 151-53, and Dominik Schröder, review of *Le Chamanisme*, *Anthropos* 48.3/4 (1953): 671-678.

<sup>119</sup> Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna*, 40-41.

<sup>120</sup> Höfler, *Kultische Geheimbünde*, 277

Eliade's pretext to group, a pretext to degroup? A reductive solution to these problems is, at the least, tempting—to separate the Wotan of the *furor teutonicus* from the shamanic Odin, to separate the *berserker* from the shamans, to separate visionary catalepsy from warlike fury—and, indeed, Ginzburg occasionally approaches such a solution.

### 8. Ginzburg and Höfler

As a thought experiment we began to describe an imaginary, alternate version of *Storia notturna*, a version with different emphases and sometimes dissimilar themes, a version never written but adumbrated in works by Ginzburg appearing in print between 1981 and 1984, a period representing roughly the first half of his work on the book. At the center of this *Storia notturna* are the days around Christmas, the Wild Hunt (and possibly Odin), charivari, groups of rowdy boys, festivals of inversion, rough popular justice, the host of the angry wandering dead. This *Storia notturna*, Ginzburg noted, was informed by “a century of research”. In order to begin thinking about Ginzburg's encounter with this research, we must ask how he first encountered the *Männerbund* thesis. This was certainly long before Ginzburg's “Charivari” essay, in which Bausinger saw the hidden outlines of Höfler's *idée fixe*, for we find in *I benandanti*, where Ginzburg discusses the visionary *battaglie notturne* fought by good benandanti with fennel stalks against evil witches with sorghum stalks, the following passage:

It may be supposed that this combat re-enacted, and to a certain extent rationalized, an older fertility rite in which two groups of youths, respectively impersonating demons favourable to fertility and the maleficent ones of destruction, symbolically struck their lower backs with stalks of fennel and sorghum to stimulate their own reproductive capacity, and by analogy, the fertility of the fields of the community. Gradually the rite may have come to be represented as an actual combat, and from the uncertain outcome of the struggle between the two opposed bands would magically depend the fertility of the land and the fate of the harvests. At a later stage these rites would cease to be practised openly and would exist precariously, between the dream-like and the

hallucinatory, in any case on a purely internal emotional plane—and yet without quite sliding into mere individual fantasizing. But these are mere hypotheses... There is absolutely nothing in the statements of the benandanti that can be interpreted as a relic of this hypothetical original rite.<sup>121</sup>

The notes for this paragraph point unmistakably towards some of the ideas that occupied Ginzburg in the period between “Charivari” talk and article and *Storia notturna*, the late 1970s to the late 1980s. On the basis of the benandanti evidence, Ginzburg declares, “we shall have to re-examine the complex problem of the relationship between witchcraft and secret youth associations,” adding, “on this question see especially [Otto] Höfler, *Kultische Geheimbünde*”. Ginzburg was undertaking precisely this re-examination in the period leading up to his Dumézil article. And not surprisingly Dumézil himself is cited on the same page, on the issue of striking with rods (analogized with the stalks of the benandanti) for the sake of communal fertility. In his 1929 *Problème des Centaures*, Dumézil had written of the Luperci whipping infertile Sabines with strips of goat skin: “this is the famous ‘Schlag mit der Lebensrute’ so frequent at end of winter festivals”.<sup>122</sup>

In the earlier conversation with Lincoln recorded in *Old Thiess*, dated 30 September 2017, Ginzburg had tried to recall, at Lincoln’s prodding, where he first encountered Thiess and Höfler. Understandably after more than half a century, Ginzburg cannot recall. Had he read the Thiess trial first in Von Bruiningk or first in Höfler? If it was Höfler, how did he arrive there? “Was it an accident of chance?,” asks Lincoln. Ginzburg’s answer: perhaps he found Höfler through Lily Weiser[-Aall].<sup>123</sup> This is unlikely since her work on *Männerbünde* dates from 1927 and her only work cited in *I benandanti*, a long dictionary entry under “Hexe”, dates from 1931,

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<sup>121</sup> B 40-41; NB 24 quoted with minor changes.

<sup>122</sup> B 40nn12-13; NB 184nn73-74; Dumézil, *Problème*, 217-18.

<sup>123</sup> Lincoln and Ginzburg, *Old Thiess*, 153-54.

i.e., both well before Höfler's 1934 book.<sup>124</sup> So how did Ginzburg arrive at Höfler? We do not know the answer, and given the truly enormous and eccentric range of Ginzburg's reading we may never know, but we can here suggest one possibility. The young Ginzburg may have found his way to Höfler through Arne Runeberg's 1947 *Witches, Demons, and Fertility Magic*. In the Italian preface to *I benandanti*—naturally written retrospectively, at the end of the benandanti project, precisely when he also discovered Thiess—Ginzburg tells us that Runeberg had pointed him to both Dag Strömbäck's *Sejd*, about Odin's shamanic magic called *seiðr* in Old Norse, a book which Ginzburg was then unable to read, as well as to Anton Mayer's 1936 *Erdmutter und Hexe*. Mayer's book, which Ginzburg describes in the preface as having “come closer than anyone else to correctly *formulating the question*” of the relationship of witchcraft to older fertility cults, is nowhere cited in *Storia notturna*—whether because it was based on “thin and insufficient evidence” or because it so openly reflected Nazi ideas about connection between *völkisch* and Indo-European religion we cannot say.<sup>125</sup> Runeberg devotes five pages to Höfler's “valuable although somewhat confused” work, and directs his readers also to the scholars who first framed Höfler's problem, namely Heinrich Schurtz and Weiser-Aall, which leaves open the possibility that Runeberg had led Ginzburg to both Höfler and also to Weiser-Aall.<sup>126</sup> Already in the preface of Runeberg's book we find these revealing lines:

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<sup>124</sup> Weiser, *Altgermanische Junglingsweihen*; Weiser-Aall, “Hexe” in *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* III (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1933), cols. 1827-1920.

<sup>125</sup> B xi-xii and nn7-8; NB xx and 174n12-13, our emphasis; on Mayer's *Erdmutter* and its context, see the pithy account in Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 168. Runeberg is not cited in *Storia notturna*.

<sup>126</sup> Arne Runeberg, *Witches, Demons, and Fertility Magic: Analysis of their Significance and Mutual Relations in West-European Folk Religion* (Helsingfors: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1947), 65-70, quotation at 65. These debts are explicitly acknowledged in Höfler, *Kultische Geheimebünde*, I, especially vii and 200-01, but *passim*.

There is nothing fantastic in the assumption that ecstatic cult-forms, as described by medieval sources, survived among the West-European peasantry throughout the Middle Ages. Some students—Margaret Alice Murray and Otto Höfler for instance—have indeed gone much farther than that when they frame theories according to which surviving, well-organized secret societies of magicians or demoniacal warriors used to meet at fixed times to perform religious ceremonies as late as the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>127</sup>

Not every reader agreed with Runeberg's skepticism. Meuli, in his brief but extravagantly positive review (later reconsidered) of *Kultische Geheimbünde*, wrote that Höfler had

proven that these legends [of the Wild Army] are for the most part descriptions of real processions, descriptions of those mummeries that have persisted into our time, especially around midwinter and shrovetide. The finding may come as a surprise, but it is undoubtedly correct...<sup>128</sup>

And although surely idiosyncratic, the review of Runeberg's *Witches* penned by Mircea Eliade reveals an important context of its reception. Margaret Murray's research had been compromised, he argues there, by *une audacieuse hypothèse*, i.e., the survival of a diminutive prehistoric race into the Middle Ages, but she had nonetheless established that witchcraft had "deep roots in popular European religion, centered around an elementary cult of fertility". He adds:

For his part, with a surer method and abundant documentation, M. Otto Höfler has shown the existence of secret societies based on initiation rituals ("Männerbünde") in the oldest Germanic religion, and found the *remains of their ceremonies* and their conceptions in Germanic beliefs and folklore until the seventeenth century... The two authors have satisfactorily proved *the authenticity of the rituals* referred to in the ecclesiastical documents of the Middle Ages.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Runeberg, *Witches, Demons, and Fertility Magic*, vii, and see also 68-69 for the same point about Höfler in particular.

<sup>128</sup> Karl Meuli, Review of Höfler, *Kultische Geheimbünde*, in *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde* 34 (1935): 77. As Ginzburg recalls, "Germanic mythology", 140, Marc Bloch's review of Höfler was also exceptionally positive.

<sup>129</sup> In *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 136.1 (1949), 122-24, 122, our emphasis. Eliade concludes his review by noting that Runeberg "would have greatly benefited from knowing the admirable comparative analysis of Alexander Slawik," which extended Höfler's model to Japan, "Kultische Geheimbünde der Japaner und Germanen," *Wiener Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte und Linguistik*

Ginzburg's and Eliade's view are at once aligned (there is something to save in both Murray and Höfler) and opposed (they have proved the authenticity of surviving rituals, as opposed to the existence of myths), but the full consequences of this for the relationship of myth and history have not yet been worked out.

### 9. Myths and Rites

The not only intellectual implications of Ginzburg's distinction between myths and rites should be clear in the case of Höfler's *Mannerbünde*, but they are brought into even starker relief by the furor, expertly treated in an article by Sabina Loriga, that arose around the publication in 2007 and subsequent withdrawal of Ariel Toaff's *Pasque di Sangue*, in the aftermath of which, not coincidentally, Bollati Boringhieri republished *L'Accusa del sangue*, Furio Jesi's book on the blood libel and the anti-Semitic "mythological machine" at its core.<sup>130</sup> The son of Elio Toaff, Chief Rabbi of Rome until 2002, the well-regarded Italian-Israeli medievalist Ariel Toaff seemed to court controversy with *Pasque*, in which he revisited the 1475 murder of Simonino of Trent, arguing, against the scholarly *communis opinio*, that some vengeance-minded communities of Ashkenazic Jews actually used the blood of Christian children, in contravention of strong Biblical and Talmudic injunctions, in their Passover celebrations.<sup>131</sup> A media circus ensued and,

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4 (1936): 675-764. Just, we might add, as Stig Wikander, cited by Runeberg at page 69, had extended Höfler's model to the ancient Aryans.

<sup>130</sup> Sabina Loriga, "Une vieille affaire? Les 'Pâques de sang' d'Ariel Toaff," *Annales* 63.1 (2008): 143-172; Jesi, *L'Accusa del sangue: La macchina mitologica antisemitica* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2007), 173. Completed in 1979, this work was first published thirteen years later (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1992).

<sup>131</sup> Toaff, *Pasque di sangue: Ebrei d'Europa e omicidi rituali* (Bologna: Mulino, 2007), chapter 12; re-published in a revised and expanded version (Bologna: Mulino, 2008), which includes Toaff, "Postfazione: Processi e metodologia storica. In difesa di Pasque di sanque", at 363-393.



although Toaff was not without his defenders in the Italian press, historians by and large challenged his methods, refuted his findings, and even questioned his motives.

At the end of the preface of *Pasque* Toaff had justified his approach in explicit relation to Ginzburg's method, quoting at length the famous passage from the introduction to *Storia notturna* we referenced above:

By means of the introjection (partial or total, gradual or immediate, violent or apparently spontaneous) of the hostile stereotype promoted by the persecutors, the victims ultimately lost their cultural identity. Anyone declining to restrict himself to recording the results of this historical violence must find a lever in those rare cases where the documentation possesses something other than a formal dialogical [in the Bakhtinian sense] character: where, that is, one can find fragments, relatively immune from distortions, of the culture that the persecution set out to eradicate.<sup>132</sup>

“The Trent trials,” Toaff then asserted, “constitute a precious document of this type,” claiming to be able to distinguish in the protocols of the proceedings between the true accounts (rather than fabrications to trick or to satisfy) of the accused on the one hand—a discourse based on mental categories foreign to Christians, in a language incomprehensible to the judges—and the stereotypes of the inquisitors on the other.<sup>133</sup> Ginzburg responded to the Toaff affair on the pages of the *Corriere della Sera*, a response “dictated by reasons also (but not only, of course) personal”, he says, given Toaff's self-applying invocation—*un richiamo abusivo*—of the method in *Storia notturna*. Ginzburg presents two crucial differences between his method and Toaff's. First, he understood the fragments of the victims' culture to be “relatively immune” to the deformations of the persecutors' culture only when they diverged from the stereotypes of the persecutors, not when they aligned with them. In Toaff's book, however, “the Jews subjected to

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<sup>132</sup> E 13; SN xxvi-xxvii

<sup>133</sup> Toaff, *Pasque di sangue*, 16.

torture confessed what the judges were looking for, namely the story of the ritual homicides: between the expectations of the judges and the responses of the accused there is not, on this point, any difference.” Second, “I [Ginzburg] specified precisely that these fragments could refer either *to myths or to rites*: and I opted, with regard to the witches’ sabbath, for the first alternative.”<sup>134</sup> In a new afterword for the second, revised edition of *Pasque* in 2008, Toaff replied directly to Ginzburg’s criticism. “Ginzburg has accused me of committing unpardonable errors by identifying not myths but rites,” Toaff writes before getting to the very marrow of the matter: “In other words, in Ginzburg’s opinion, I have anachronistically adhered to the discredited historiography of Margaret Murray.”<sup>135</sup> And, he could have added, of Otto Höfler.

Far from an issue raised retrospectively by Ginzburg, the distinction between myths and rites had very much been on Toaff’s mind when he wrote *Pasque*. Indeed, in a line removed from the second edition, he wrote, “[t]herefore we have to decide if the confessions ... document myths, that is, beliefs and ideologies going far back in time; or rites, that is, events that effectively occurred in reality and were celebrated in prescribed and consolidated forms, with their more or less fixed baggage of formulas and anthems, accompanied by those magical practices and superstitions that were an integral part of the mentality of the protagonists”. And in another deleted line he presented for himself a high historiographical standard: “Wanting therefore to conclude that the murders, celebrated in the rite of Passover, were not only myths, that is, religious beliefs diffused and structured in a more or less coherent manner, but real rites

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<sup>134</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, “Pasque di sangue e sabba, miti ma non riti. Ecco l’errore commesso da Ariel Toaff,” *Corriere della Sera* (23 February 2007), our emphasis. Adriano Prospero had pointed out Toaff’s misuse of Ginzburg already on the pages of *La Repubblica* (10 February 2007).

<sup>135</sup> We quote the English version of the afterword provided to *medievalists.net* by Toaff, entitled “Afterword: Trials and Historical Methodology. In defense of *Pasque di sangue*”, 10.

proper to organized groups and forms of worship actually practiced, we will be called to a due (*doverosa*) methodological prudence.”<sup>136</sup> Especially striking in both of these passages is how carefully Toaff delineates the contours of rite, as indeed it is (for Toaff) rites that are the subject of his book, as compared to myth. The alternatives Toaff presents in the title of chapter V, “omicidi rituali o favole di Grimm?”, are moreover suggestive of a failure to grasp the meaning of myth. In his own account of the Simonino trials, Ronnie Po-chia Hsia has written of how “the invention of past child killings as evidence for a history of ritual murders” was one of the central motifs of the coherent official story of which “[t]he strappada extracted confirmation”.<sup>137</sup> Among those who described earlier ritual murders under torture was one Moses of Bamberg, who described encountering, in the woods near a village in the vicinity of Frankfurt (Oder) in 1466, two Jewish men about to dispose of the bodies of two Christian boys from whom they had extracted bottles full of blood to later sell. Moses “recited his fantastic confession to the attentive inquisitors,” Toaff notes, “swinging, hanging by his feet from the rope, upside down”. Yet Toaff’s conclusion diverges from Po-chia Hsia’s: “If this was a Grimm’s fairy tale, told intentionally (*a bella posta*) to terrorize children, giving them sleepless nights, we do not know. What is certain is that poor Moses of Bamberg did not precisely remember the identity of the two hunters and did not know how to locate the woods where their crimes had been committed, nor did know the names of the two victims or of the village from which they were taken, nor the river where their bodies were thrown.”<sup>138</sup> Fairy tale or ritual murder. Myth or rite. The

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<sup>136</sup> Toaff, *Pasque di sangue*, 10-13.

<sup>137</sup> Po-chia Hsia, *Trent 1475: Stories of a Ritual Murder* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 86-87.

<sup>138</sup> Toaff, *Pasque di sangue*, 71-72. Toaff also removed a passage, 12, about the regulations observed around the use of judicial torture, which could certainly be read as a defense of torture’s power to elicit actual truths.

alternative that cannot be admitted here is that Moses had fabricated the story under torture precisely because it confirmed the inquisitors' coherent narrative, and precisely in a way that confirmed that narrative rather than revealed something effectively true about a cultural identity lost in the face of persecution.

In *Homo necans*, Walter Burkert explains that the problem of myth and ritual was, by the middle of the twentieth century, chiefly debated in the anglophone world, where something like a “radical way out” if not a conclusion had been reached in the work of Jane Harrison, S.H. Hooke, and others. This solution, fascinating to Burkert but also unappealing to him, at the very least because it speaks of unobservable and unverifiable things in prehistory, held that myths (unlike fairy and folk tales) are always linked to rituals. At the same time, though, Burkert notes that there was a parallel Continental attempt to link myth and ritual, citing as examples both Dumézil in *Le problème des centaurs* and Höfler who “derived the sagas about hordes of wild men and about werewolves from ritual”.<sup>139</sup> Eliade's own approach to this problem was ambiguous. As we have seen, he was willing to accept the persistence of real rituals in the works of Höfler and the Swedish Indologist and Iranologist Stig Wikander, both longtime personal friends and fellow men of the political right.<sup>140</sup> But the issue can be complicated. In a very brief essay occasioned by the publication of Jan de Vries's 1954 *Betrachtungen zum Märchen*, Eliade

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<sup>139</sup> Burkert, *Homo necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983 [German original 1972]), 29-34, quoting 30 and 30n4. For Burkert's own mature take on myths and rituals, see also his *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 56-8 and 99-101. For a brief introduction to the wider problem in (the chiefly anglophone) scholarship, see Robert A. Segal, “Introduction”, to Segal, ed., *The Myth and Ritual Theory: An Anthology* (London: Blackwell, 1998), 1-14.

<sup>140</sup> See Eliade papers, box 84, folder 11 (Höfler) and box 89, folder 20 (Wikander). On Wikander's politics, see Stefan Arvidsson, “Stig Wikander och forskningen om ariska mannaforbund”, *CHAOS: Dansk-norsk tidsskrift for religionshistoriske studier* 38 (2002): 55-68.

addressed the relationship between myths and rites in relation to the Soviet folklorist Vladimir Propp's 1946 *Historical Roots of the Wonder Tale*. Seeing Propp as a continuator of "the ritualist hypothesis" of the folklorist Saintyves (pen name of Émile Nourry), Eliade cast the problem in these terms: "the whole problem is to know if the tale describes a system of rites from a precise cultural stage or if its initiatory scenario is 'imaginary', in the sense that it is not linked to a historico-cultural context, expressing rather an ahistoric behavior, archetypal of the psyche".<sup>141</sup> Although this essay does not appear in *Storia notturna*, Ginzburg cited it in his 1984 "Witches' Sabbat" essay, on the point that "Propp's analysis of the mythical content of fairy tales is very convincing; much more debatable is his attempt to decipher in them the traces of specific rites"<sup>142</sup>: a point that will grow in importance in *Storia notturna*, where the Propp (not, to be sure, of *Historical Roots* but) of 1928's *Morphology of the Folktale*, Propp the morphologist, appears as a kind of tutelary spirit, whose method (along with Wittgenstein's and, ultimately, Goethe's) explicitly bridges the gap between the achronic and the diachronic.<sup>143</sup> The problem of myths and rites is always, in Ginzburg, also about the problem of myth and history. Both problems are, in Ginzburg, always deeply political ones. Eliade's role as an interlocutor regarding both problems will become clearer later in this essay, but the reception of Eliade in Italy was cast in political terms from the very beginning.

## 10. *Collana viola*

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<sup>141</sup> Eliade, "Les mythes et les contes de fées", in Eliade, *Aspects du mythe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), appendix 1, 233-244, 235-36.

<sup>142</sup> Ginzburg, "Witches' Sabbat", 51n22.

<sup>143</sup> E.g., E 16 and 28n62; SN xxx and xliii n62. We cannot even begin to broach here the subject of the origins of Ginzburg's morphological method, but we would like to at least indicate two revealing works from the early phase of *Storia notturna*'s gestation: "Mostrare e dimostrare: Risposta a Pinelli e altri critici", *Quaderni storici* 50 (1982): 702-727 and "Datazione assoluta e datazione relativa: Sul metodo di Longhi", *Paragone* 386 (1982): 5-17, especially 9.

Carlo Ginzburg's relationship with the Turinese publishing house Einaudi is surely well known: co-founded with Giulio Einaudi in Turin in 1933 by his father Leone (who died in prison in Rome eleven years later, following vicious torture at the hands of Nazis), the *casa editrice* published the first Italian version of each of Carlo Ginzburg's major works from the mid-1960s through the early 90s (three of them appearing in the important "Biblioteca della cultura storica" series first envisioned by his father) and it also published the groundbreaking series "Microstorie" that Ginzburg co-edited with Giovanni Levi (along with Simona Cerutti) between 1981 and 1991.<sup>144</sup> In the aftermath of the Second World War, Einaudi published a celebrated series of books, edited by the ethnologist and cultural historian Ernesto de Martino and the man-of-letters Cesare Pavese, and known, due to the purple frame on their covers, as the "Collana viola". In Pavese's conception, the series filled an evident lacuna: "While in England, France, Germany, and America for nearly a century, history, sociology and psychology have been renewing themselves through the passionate interest in primitive and savage societies, their cults, institutions, and techniques, very little had been done by us [Italians] to inform the cultured public of these retchings of a new and bizarre humanism." To find this bizarre humanism meant looking for books "pertaining to the 'dark side' of the human race (especially the world of magic

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<sup>144</sup> On Leone Ginzburg's role at Einaudi, see Luisa Mangoni, *Pensare i libri: La casa editrice Einaudi dagli anni trenta agli anni sessanta* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999), 3-69. Carlo Ginzburg has himself pointed to Mangoni's work, justly proud of his father's involvement in the enterprise; see, e.g., Dino Messina, "Padri e figli: Leone e Carlo Ginzburg", in *Nuova Rivista Storica* 94 (2010): 285-288, 287, which is based on a 1 May 2009 interview in the *Corriere della sera*. And see also now "Medaglie e conchiglie: Ancora su Morfologia e storia. Postfazione alla nuova edizione di *Storia notturna*," in Ginzburg, *Storia notturna: Una decifrazione del Sabba* (Milan: Adelphi, 2017), 347-377, 364n1; a revised English version of this has appeared as "Medals and Shells. On Morphology and History, Once Again", *Critical Inquiry* 45.2 (2019): 380-95. On the series *Microstorie*, see Serena la Malfa, "La collana Einaudi 'Microstorie' (1981-1991)," *Storiografia* 20 (2016): 197-214.

and of religion) as well as to the ‘dark side’ of our very souls as ‘modern’ and ‘westerners’.”<sup>145</sup> For some this “dark side” proved too dark. The strongest feelings of displeasure among the workers and managers at Einaudi and beyond were provoked by the publication in 1949 of a translation of the Nazi ethnologist Ewald Volhard’s *Kannibalismus*, to which was appended an introduction by the Fascist race theorist Giulio Cogni. In a letter of the same year to Pavese, De Martino took note of “the criticisms of the ‘orthodox’ [the orthodox Left] against the Collana viola, which in their petulant judgment should even be called the Collana nera, i.e., nazi-fascist,” and spoke openly about the dangers inherent in the subject matter of the series: “The very material of the Collana viola constitutes a very fertile ground for the germination of racist, esoteric, decadent, turbidly romantic, and on the whole reactionary motifs.”<sup>146</sup> The same thing could certainly be said for the subject matter of Ginzburg’s *Storia notturna*. Given these thematic similarities, it is unsurprising that slightly more than half the authors who appeared in the Einaudi series (i.e., 1948-56, after which Bollati Boringhieri continued to produce volumes through 1967) also appear, albeit sometimes in other works or editions, in *Storia*.<sup>147</sup> Ginzburg directly cites only a handful of the Collana viola books themselves, most prominently De Martino’s own *Mondo magico* (the first in the series, 1948) and Vladimir Propp’s *Le radici storiche dei racconti di fate* (the seventh, 1949; Russian original 1946), the work we discussed above in relation to Eliade, which had been suggested for the series by the Enlightenment

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<sup>145</sup> Cesare Pavese and Ernesto de Martino, *La collana viola: Lettere 1945-50*, ed. Pietro Angelini (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991), 122-23 and 36n57.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-53.

<sup>147</sup> A complete catalogue of the Collana viola may be found in Pietro Angelini, “La collana viola,” *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 9.2 (1985): 299-318, at 314-18. Note that Ginzburg has described Angelini’s essay as “overly schematic in its interpretation”; see “Momigliano and De Martino,” *History and Theory* 30.4 (1991 [Italian original 1988]): 37-48, 38n4.

historian and Russianist (and one-time cultural attaché in Moscow) Franco Venturi. The third volume that Ginzburg cites, not at all prominently and in a wryly critical note, is Eliade's *Trattato di storia delle religioni* (1954; French original 1949) alongside the preface written for it by De Martino himself.<sup>148</sup> Two years earlier the series had published Eliade's *Tecniche dello yoga* (1952, French original 1948), also with a preface by De Martino. This too had been a controversial decision. In response to early concerns voiced by Antonio Giolitti and Ambrogio Donini, both aligned with the Communist Party, about Eliade's right-wing politics and collaborationist past, Pavese in a 1949 letter defended the then-in-progress translations on "scientific" grounds, asking rhetorically, "Should we stop publishing Heisenberg's scientific works because Heisenberg is a Nazi?"<sup>149</sup> Unlike Eliade, the books of De Martino and Propp loom very large in Ginzburg's own accounts of the conception and writing of *Storia notturna*. In his own telling, Ginzburg found his way to De Martino's *Mondo magico* through Pavese's 1947 *Dialoghi con Leucò*, a series of mythical dialogues steeped in Pavese's ethnological and psychological reading, and Ginzburg's earliest reading of *Mondo magico* fits neatly with the stated goals of the Collana viola; it "seemed an invitation," he writes, "to overcome... the ideological antithesis between rationalism and irrationalism".<sup>150</sup> This was no longer his goal when writing *Storia notturna*, but the kinds of questions being asked of and by the editors of the

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<sup>148</sup> E 28n67; SN xliii n67.

<sup>149</sup> Cesare Pavese, *Officina Einaudi: Lettere editoriali, 1940-1950* (Turin: Einaudi, 2008), 388-89.

<sup>150</sup> Ginzburg, "Preface to the Italian Edition," in Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), vii-xiv, viii. This preface serves as a kind of early (or even provisional) postscript for *Storia notturna* since the "cycle of work" represented in *Clues* emerged during the period of research for *Storia*. Ginzburg's debts to De Martino predate *I benandanti*; see, e.g., his 1961 review of De Martino's *La terra del rimorso*, in *Il centro sociale* 51-52 (1963): n.p., as well as NB xxii and 181n45; B xv and 30n8.



Collana viola, and about the kinds of works that appeared in the series, would nonetheless continue to emerge in relation to Ginzburg's masterwork, as we saw above with Willem de Blécourt's critique.

## 11. Questions and Answers, Myth and History

Though superficially discussing the “debate about shamans”, and without mentioning Höfler by name, Ginzburg replied to De Blécourt's allegations in a 2016 essay called “Travelling in Spirit”, calling them, accurately in our opinion, “personally offensive (and false)”. He argues:

The involvement of scholars with a more or less explicit Fascist and Nazi orientation is well known. Their political and ideological commitment usually affected their research—both their approach and their results. But we must bear in mind that (as I once wrote about Georges Dumézil's work) a sharp distinction should be drawn between *questions and answers*. Answers that we regard as morally or politically unacceptable should not necessarily imply a dismissal of the questions they allegedly addressed. “Even racism, to take one extreme example” I argued “is one answer (scientifically unfounded and with a monstrous practical outcome) to a very real question related to the connection between biology and culture”. The topics we are discussing, and the scholarship related to them, are full of treacherous, disturbing implications. Political correctness will not protect us.<sup>151</sup>

The somewhat nebulous opening paragraph of Ginzburg's Dumézil essay “Mitologia germanica”, referenced explicitly here, with its discussion of collapsing the distinction between questions and answers, concludes with this sentence: “To this day, in some quarters, research into extended [*lunghe*] cultural continuities is not only suspect, but inherently unacceptable because it has been controlled for so long (with a few significant exceptions) by scholars more or

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<sup>151</sup> Ginzburg, “Travelling in Spirit: From Friuli to Siberia”, in Peter Jackson, ed., *Horizons of Shamanism: A Triangular Approach to the History and Anthropology of Ecstatic Techniques* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2016), 35-51, 48. Our emphasis.

less tied to the *culture of the right*.”<sup>152</sup> Even though we sometimes cannot accept Dumézil’s answers on moral and political grounds, Ginzburg is saying, we should not dismiss his questions just because they have been asked, for the most part, by scholars associated with the culture of the right, scholars like Dumézil and Eliade, and indeed Höfler. No work is off limits because of a political label. After all, as Ginzburg notes elsewhere, De Martino himself had found his way to the cultural relativist Shirokogoroff’s work on the Tungus by reading Wilhelm Mühlmann “a nazi through and through”.<sup>153</sup> In a very famous 1974 essay that first appeared in the *Annali* of the Scuola Normale in Pisa, Arnaldo Momigliano presented “Le regole del giuoco nello studio della storia antica”, with the ninth of the ten rules being: “The historian is free to choose his own problem, his working hypothesis, and the expository mode in which he presents his findings.” He is free, indeed, to bring with him all his convictions—but only free up to a point:

If he is a devotee of Marx, Max Weber, Jung, or Braudel, surely he will adopt the method of his master. When one traverses the field of historical research, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Marx, Weber, Jung, and Braudel teach us to put specific *questions (domande)* to the sources, but they do not determine their *answer (risposta)*.<sup>154</sup>

Momigliano adds that a comparative approach can be valuable in terms of heeding what the sources tell us, but that comparison too can go awry, leading to “fantastic interpretations,” as in the case of Dumézil’s discovery of Indian castes in archaic Rome. Ginzburg has highlighted this passage in an important recent essay called “Our Words,

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<sup>152</sup> Ginzburg, “Germanic mythology”, 126; for the original language, Ginzburg, “Mitologia germanica e nazismo: Su un vecchio libro di Georges Dumézil”, *Quaderni storici* 57 (1984): 857-882, 857. Our emphasis.

<sup>153</sup> Ginzburg, “On Ernesto de Martino’s ‘The End of the World’ and its Genesis”, *Chicago Review* 60/61 (2017): 77-91, 78.

<sup>154</sup> Momigliano, “The Rules of the Game in the Study of Ancient History [Italian original 1974],” trans. Kenneth W. Yu, *History and Theory* 55 (February 2016): 39-45, 45, used with a minor change.

and Theirs”, comparing Momigliano’s rule to one established by Kenneth Pike about the *emic* (“their words”/actor’s categories) and the *etic* (“our words”/observer’s categories). For Ginzburg, the historian begins with *etic* questions, but her research finds answers articulated in *emic* terms, and these *emic* findings continuously reshape the initial questions.<sup>155</sup> Ultimately the arc of *Storia notturna* is from history to morphology, from *emic* to *etic*, and back. In a way, Ginzburg, in “Mitologia germanica” and in his terse and self-reflexive reply to De Blécourt, adds an addendum to Momigliano’s rule. The freedom of historians to choose their own problems, to ask questions informed by their own political commitments, extends to asking the (treacherous, dangerous) questions often associated with the political commitments of others. What matters, ultimately, is the answers and the way the authentic feedback loop from the sources alters and subverts the original questions. Sometimes questions first formulated by racists and Nazis can have answers that ultimately subvert racism and Nazism. Political correctness will not save us. Their questions, our answers.<sup>156</sup> We may now reread the paragraph again *luce clarior* with Ginzburg’s defense against De Blécourt’s charges in mind, as a preemptive defense

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<sup>155</sup> Ginzburg, “Our Words, and Theirs: A Reflection on the Historian’s Craft, Today”, in *Historical Knowledge: In Quest of Theory, Method and Evidence*, ed. by Susanna Fellman and Marjatta Rahikainen (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), pp. 97–119, 108.

<sup>156</sup> The freedom pertaining to questions/answers need not be politically inflected. A key example from *Storia notturna*: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes: Introduction to a Science of Mythology 2*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper, 1973), 464-68, found in lameness across a wide range of myths a “diagrammatic expression” representing a desired imbalance in the periodicity of seasonal change, and he cited Montaigne’s essay on the lame, which begins with a discussion of intercalary days and the newly-adopted Gregorian calendar in France, and which also involves Scythians and witches; see Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (New York: Penguin, 1993), III.11, 1160-1172. Ginzburg rejects his answers, but finds the question itself remarkably productive. E 226, SN 206-07: “But if [Lévi-Strauss’s] argument [his *answer*] appears obviously inadequate, the question which provoked it (why do myths and rituals hanging on lameness recur in such different cultures?) is real enough”.

and mission statement for *Storia notturna*: Ginzburg is reclaiming the diffusion of myth—that *lungheissima* of cultural continuities—and perhaps even the whole subject matter of the Collana viola from the culture of the right, a more ambitious project even than the explicit one to which he dedicated himself in the book.

This is also a project with a parallel in Ginzburg's more recent work. The expression "culture of the right (*cultura di destra*)", used twice in the opening paragraph of the Dumézil essay, calls to mind the well-known 1979 book of the same title by the left-wing mythologist Furio Jesi, who tragically died the next year at the age of 39. When Ioan Coulianu read Jesi's book he immediately wrote in dismay to Eliade, his mentor and colleague at the University of Chicago, as Eliade himself recorded in his journal: "From a letter of Culianu, forwarded from Chicago, I learn that Furio Jesi has devoted a chapter of calumnies and insults to me in his book that has come out recently, *Cultura di destra*. I learned long ago that Jesi considers me an anti-Semite, fascist, Iron Guardist, etc. Probably he accuses me also of Buchenwald."<sup>157</sup> Ginzburg naturally cited Jesi's book on Eliade's "youthful leanings in a racist and anti-Semitic direction" at the end of his

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<sup>157</sup> Furio Jesi, *Cultura di destra. Con tre inediti e un'intervista*, ed. Andrea Cavalletti (Rome: Nottetempo, 2011), first published as a book in 1979 by Garzanti composed of essays that had appeared between 1975 and 1978 in *Comunità*. Eliade, *Journal IV 1979-1985*, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), entry of 6 June 1979, 17. Couliano defended Eliade for years, e.g., in "Mircea Eliade und die blinde Schildkröte", in Hans Peter Duerr, ed., *Die Mitte der Welt: Aufsätze zu Mircea Eliade* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), 216-243. For these events, see the excellent biography of Florin Turcanu, *Mircea Eliade, le prisonnier de l'histoire* (Paris: Découverte, 2003), 506-512. On the specter of Buchenwald, Cristiano Grottanelli has indeed argued that Jesi (albeit incorrectly) saw Jews as the intended victims in the perverse sacrificial ideology of the Iron Guard, with which Eliade was aligned, see Grottanelli, "Fruitful Death: Mircea Eliade and Ernst Jünger on Human Sacrifice, 1937-1945", *Numen* 52 (2005): 116-145, 125-27, a position comparable to that of Michael Ley, *Holocaust als Menschenopfer: Vom Christentum zur politischer Religion des Nationalsozialismus* (Münster and Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 2002).

Dumézil essay, and he came back to Jesi when he turned his full attention to Eliade's "ambivalent legacy" in an essay of about a decade ago. There he tells of how "[i]n the early 1940s Thomas Mann wrote to Kerényi that myth should be taken away from Fascist intellectuals and put to a humanist purpose—a remark Mann was so fond of that he repeated it twice, before applying it to his own novel *Joseph and His Brothers*", which remark, Ginzburg adds in a note, had been "quoted by Furio Jesi... polemically opposing Mann to Eliade", with Jesi indeed arguing that Mann chose exile against Nazism while Eliade's sympathy for Nazism kept him from returning home after the war.<sup>158</sup> Studying the refractions of this anecdote can help us see something of the remnants of the "humanist Marxism" that Molho identified in *Benandanti* and *Formaggio* also in *Storia notturna*.

More interesting to Ginzburg than the opposition Mann to Eliade, however, is the opposition Ernesto de Martino to Eliade. Indeed the whole of Ginzburg's essay on Eliade can be seen, in a certain sense, as a recapitulation and elaboration of a suggestive note in *Storia notturna*, where he discussed Eliade's *Mythe de l'éternel retour*, "by far his most original [book]," in which

Eliade repeated a number of elements already isolated by Frazer... combining them with mortuary themes (*temi mortuari*) that emerged from the research of Dumézil (*Le problème des Centaures*), Höfler (*Kultische Geheimbünde*), and one of the latter's followers, [Alexander] Slawik. The *pathos* of defeat inspired Eliade,

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<sup>158</sup> Ginzburg, "Germanic Mythology", 218n54. Ginzburg "Mircea Eliade's Ambivalent Legacy", in *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach & Mircea Eliade*, eds. Christian K. Wedemeyer and Wendy Doniger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 307-323, 316 and n38. Jesi also repeated the remark more than twice, in *Cultura di destra*, ppXX; in his short book *Thomas Mann* [=Il Castoro 67-68] (Florence: Nuova Italia, 1972), at 72 but see also 70-80 for a wider discussion of the humanization of myth; and in "Thomas Mann, Giuseppe e i suoi fratelli", in Jesi, *Materiali mitologici: Mito e antropologia nella cultura mitteleuropea* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979), 253-71, 257.

who had behind him a Fascist and anti-Semitic experience (see [Furio] Jesi, *Cultura di destra*, Milan 1979, pp. 38 ff.), to construct a theory of flight from history. Though starting out from a partly analogous reflection on the theme of crises and a new beginning, the opposite conclusions were reached by [Ernesto] De Martino in *Il mondo magico* (1948)".<sup>159</sup>

In an extraordinary passage in *Mythe* Eliade speaks precisely of a “refus de l'histoire,” a refusal of rather than a flight from history, by virtue of which “tens of millions of men were able, for century after century, to endure great historical pressures without despairing, without committing suicide or falling into that spiritual aridity that always brings with it a relativistic or nihilistic view of history”.<sup>160</sup> Jesi would seize upon this passage explicitly, speaking of “a past that does not exist”, a past that “has become a dough that can be modeled and cooked as one likes: the material par excellence of technicized myths, the authentic ‘eternal present’ for which Mircea Eliade has written the apology, declaring it what has saved men”.<sup>161</sup> Indeed, this is the very core of what Jesi understands by “culture of the right”. When an interviewer from *L'Espresso* in the Summer of 1979 asked him directly “[w]hat do you mean by culture of the right?”, he began his

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<sup>159</sup> E 203n70; SN 183n70. On a “flight from history” in Eliade, see also Dario Sabbatucci, *Il mito, il rito, e la storia* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1978), 242n2.

<sup>160</sup> Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper, 1959 [French original 1949]), 152. Eliade had earlier declared “the abolition of ‘history,’ the problem which is our prime concern in this essay”, 53. One should read Ginzburg here in light of the important pages on Eliade in Vittorio Lanternari, *La grande festa: Vita ritual e sistemi di produzione nelle società tradizionali* (Bari: Dedalo, 2004 [Original 1959]), 538-549, especially 543, where Eliade’s conception of the New Year festival is described as realizing a “collective mystical flight (*volo*) of society, in order to voluntarily and durably escape outside history”.

<sup>161</sup> Jesi, *Cultura di destra*, pp. xx. The distinction between genuine and “technicized myths”, originally Kerényi’s, was important in Jesi’s thought; the latter being “intentionally invoked by man to achieve specific ends”, see Jesi, “Mito e linguaggio della collettività”, in Jesi, *Letteratura e mito* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002), 35-6. In another context, Ginzburg has also written of “the atemporal and absolute dimension of the eternal present” in myth, itself “by definition, a story already told, a story that we already know”; see his “Myth: Deceit and Distance”, in Ginzburg, *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance*, trans. Martin Ryle and Kate Soper (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 25-61, 34, 61.

reply with these words, “[t]he culture within which the past is a sort of homogenized porridge that can be modeled and kept in shape in the most useful way,” as well as a culture in which a “religion of death” prevails.<sup>162</sup>

Ginzburg’s telling expression “temi mortuari” refers clearly to several pages of *Mythe* where Eliade speaks in such terms—of “animali funebri”, of the “cavallo animale funebre per eccellenza”, of “divinità ctonico-funerarie”, in the translation of Giovanni Cantoni<sup>163</sup>—with reference above all to *Le Problème des centaures*, in which Dumézil “studied the scenario of the end and the beginning of the year in a considerable part of the Indo-European world... and has distinguished the elements deriving from initiation ceremonies and preserved, in more or less corrupt form, by mythology and folklore”; to Höfler’s 1934 *Kultische Geheimbünde*, where “[f]rom an examination of the myths and rites of the Germanic secret societies and Männerbünde [sic], Höfler has drawn similar conclusions as to the importance of the twelve intercalary days and especially of New Year’s Day”; and Alexander Slawik’s 1936 article “Kultische Geheimbünde der Japaner und Germanen”, which expanded Höfler’s thesis to Japan, finding New Year’s visitations of the dead framed by the ceremonies and rites of all-male secret societies.<sup>164</sup> In his *Chamanisme*, published not long before *Mythe*, Eliade was even more emphatic about horses and the dead:

Pre-eminently the funerary animal and the psychopomp, the “horse” is employed by the shaman, in various contexts, as a means of achieving ecstasy, that is, the “coming out of oneself” that makes the mystical journey possible. ... the horse is the mythical image of death and hence is incorporated into the ideologies and techniques of ecstasy... this is why it also plays a role of the first importance in certain types of masculine initiation (the *Männerbünde*).<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Jesi, *Cultura di destra*, interview appended to the text, pp.XX.

<sup>163</sup> Eliade, *Il mito dell’eterno ritorno*, trans. Cantoni, 2nd edition (Turin: Boria, 1975), 94-98.

<sup>164</sup> Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 66-67, quotations at 66.

<sup>165</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*, 467.

This is Eliade under the power of the intertwined enchantments of *Problème* and of *Kultische Geheimbunde*. Although neither Dumézil nor Höfler cite it, another work would surely have loomed over any discussion of the rites of intercalary days, which tie together the whole nexus of ideas at stake in Ginzburg's note and in the alternative version of *Storia*. In *The Scapegoat*, the 1913 sixth part of *The Golden Bough*, Frazer discusses what he thought was an ancient intercalary period, necessary for equating the solar and lunar years, falling on the twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany: an hypothesis he describes (and think here of Ginzburg's abundant "threads" and "conjectures") as a "a web of conjectures woven from the gossamer threads of popular superstition".<sup>166</sup> "To the primitive mind," Frazer writes,

it might well seem that an intercalary period stands outside of the regular order of things, forming part neither of the lunar nor of the solar system; it is an excrescence, inevitable but unaccountable, which breaks the smooth surface of ordinary existence, an eddy which interrupts the even flow of months and years. Hence it may be inferred that the ordinary rules of conduct do not apply to such extraordinary periods, and that accordingly men may do in them what they would never dream of doing at other times. Thus intercalary days tend to degenerate into seasons of unbridled license; they form an interregnum during which the customary restraints of law and morality are suspended and the ordinary rulers abdicate their authority in favour of a temporary regent, a sort of puppet king, who bears a more or less indefinite, capricious, and precarious sway over a community given up for a time to riot, turbulence, and disorder.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> J. G. Frazer, *The Scapegoat* [=Part VI of *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 3rd edition, vol. 9] (London: Macmillan, 1913), 344.

<sup>167</sup> Frazer, *The Scapegoat*, 328-29. Along similar lines Hans Peter Duerr has spoken evocatively of what he calls "times between times" in his *Dreamtime: Concerning the Boundary Between Wilderness and Civilization*, trans. Felicitas Goodman (New York: Blackwell, 1985 [German original 1978]) or, with reference to Ginzburg's benandanti in a chapter called "Wild Women and Werewolves", at 35, of the "outside of time" when people outside the modern West "turned into animals or hybrid creatures or... reversed their social roles" or "might roam bodily through the land or only 'in spirit', in ecstasy, with or without hallucinogenic drugs."



Though the annual method of intercalation had long ago “faded alike from the memory of the peasant and the page of the historian,” associated superstitions had stayed alive in popular memory until Frazer’s own day, since “[i]t is the simplest ideas that live longest in the simple minds of the peasantry.”<sup>168</sup> Frazer had in mind the well-known figures of merriment and inversion in Britain and Western Europe—the Feasts of Fools, the Boy Bishops, Abbots of Unreason, and Lords of Misrule—but adduces also examples of intercalary superstitions from the Egyptians and Aryans, the Aztecs and Mayas.

We will return to Misrule below, but we will also return to Ginzburg’s “Mitologia germanica” essay. As we noted at the start of this essay, Molho had commented especially on the “reticence” he found in the polemic. Bruce Lincoln had called it a “fierce critique”, and that is how most have read it. But what kind of fierceness is marked by reticence? Could the same language be used of Ginzburg’s treatment of Otto Höfler? Would it be used of his treatment of Margaret Murray, which in many ways parallels it?

## 12. Eliade and Winter

The cold winters of Eliade’s youth in Bucharest are fixtures of his memoirs. On wistful pages, pages marked with melancholy and nostalgia, he describes the initiations, secrets, and innocent anarchy of his own childhood *Männerbünde*:

We children played cops and robbers in a lot on calea Călărași led by some shoemaker’s apprentices who had taught us all kinds of tricks (such as how to leave secret chalk signs on walls without being caught). Then we would join a gang of urchins in back of the Church of St. Gheorge, where we could hide in a big courtyard that apparently was abandoned. When the winter came, we gathered

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<sup>168</sup> Frazer, *The Scapegoat*, 344-45.

on the vacant lot for snowball fights. I would return home toward evening, wet and dirty, with my clothes torn.<sup>169</sup>

One winter's evening he returned home, after a long day of sledding, with dangerously frostbitten feet and this put an end to his days and nights of hibernal abandon. From then on, he would watch the snow pile up from the attic of his house on strada Melodieii—destroyed in 1935 he tells us—and read the books in the precocious library he was already constructing for himself.<sup>170</sup> But roguish days would return, and worse. One immediately thinks of the (surely at least in part autobiographical) milieu of the lost and dissolute characters of his 1935 bildungsroman *The Hooligans*, and of the nationalist and anti-Semitic movement he was by then actively supporting, the Iron Guard, which Daniel Dubuisson has tellingly also called “a sort of Männerbund”.<sup>171</sup> That Eliade's politics and views on myth were intricately related is by now well established, not least the connection between the “flight from history” and Eliade's own efforts to evade his own past.<sup>172</sup> “Eliade does not like to have his past recalled,” wrote Claudio Mutti, with calm understatement, “for understandable reasons”.<sup>173</sup> Is it that simple?

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<sup>169</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography: Volume 1, 1907-1937: Journey East, Journey West*, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 31-32.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 46, 141.

<sup>171</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Les Hooligans*, trans. Alain Paruit (Paris: L'Herne, 1987 [Romanian original 1935]); Daniel Dubuisson, *Twentieth Century Mythologies*, trans. Martha Cunningham (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 225; Leon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s* (Oxford and New York: Pergamon, 1991), 87-92, 120-126.

<sup>172</sup> Ivan Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History* (New York, 1987); Dubuisson, *Twentieth Century Mythologies*.

<sup>173</sup> Claudio Mutti, *Les plumes de l'archange: Quatre intellectuels roumains face à la Garde de Fer: Nae Ionescu, Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Constantin Noica*, trans. Philippe Baillet (Chalonsur-Saône: Hérodote, 1993), 80.

We can only note it here, but the Kwakiutl as described by Franz Boas (and later by Frazer) had an enormous impact on the Dumézil of *Problème* and of *Horace et les Curiaces* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), as well as on Eliade.

Winter also plays an import role in Eliade’s theories. For Eliade as for the Kwakiutl cannibals of the Pacific Northwest and for the Nordic berserkers, winter is “the Sacred Time, when the spirits are believed to return among the living”.<sup>174</sup> In such male societies

The fundamental experience is provoked by the initiates’ meeting with the dead, who return to earth more especially about the winter solstice. Winter is also the season when the initiates change into wolves. In other words, during the winter the members of the band are able to transmute their profane condition and attain to a superhuman existence, whether by consorting with the Ancestors or by appropriating the behavior, that is the magic, of the carnivora. ... The ancient Germans called this sacred force *wut*, a term that Adam von Bremen translated by *furor*; it was a sort of demonic frenzy, which filled the warrior’s adversary with terror and finally paralyzed him.

Not only adversaries, at least not *sensu stricto*, for the “members of the group [also] terrorize women and noninitiates and in some sort exercise a ‘right of rapine’”, which “assimilate[s] the members of the warrior band to carnivora” as they partake in “frenzied ecstasy” while masked, their masks “attest[ing] the presence of Ancestors, the return of the souls of the dead”. Pride of place in all of this belongs, of course, to the Germanic men’s associations “so brilliantly studied by Lily Weiser, Otto Höfler, and Georges Dumézil”.<sup>175</sup> The language of the *Männerbund* abounds when these subjects appear: the Luperci at Rome show “vestiges of an initiation of the Männerbund type”, Óðinn-Wodan is “protector of the Männerbünde, which, like all societies of ecstatic and martial structure, terrorized the villages”, and so on.<sup>176</sup> The New Year is the time for “abolishing the past year and past time”, it is the time associated with “the extinction of fires, the

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<sup>174</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper, 1958), 68-69.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-84

<sup>176</sup> Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, volume 2, *From Gautama Buddha to the Triumph of Christianity*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982 [French original, 1978]), 122, 162.

return of the souls of the dead, social confusion of the type exemplified by the Saturnalia, erotic license, and so on”.<sup>177</sup> The time of hooliganism, of misrule, of charivaris. It is a time of initiation. And if initiation rites survived in Christian Europe, Eliade tells us, they survived in the “the masquerades and dramatic ceremonies that accompany the Christian winter festivals, which take place between Christmas and Carnival”.<sup>178</sup>

Back to Eliade’s diary: the snow reminds him, at that point in his late 60s, of his childhood in Romania. The attic on strada Melodiei. He thinks of his favorite wintertime books. The choice of *Gösta Berlings saga* is not at all strange. Telling the story of the defrocked minister Gösta Berling and his band of revelers, the cavaliers of Ekeby, Selma Lagerlöf’s 1891 debut novel eschewed the then regnant and ugly realism of Strindberg in favor of a playful style, alternating between the magical and the Romantic. Redolent of myth and the local folktales of Värmland in western Sweden, what Lagerlöf called a *saga*, Thomas Mann called a *mär* (a term reminiscent of the epic *Nibelungenlied*, the diminutive of which, *märchen*, means “fairy tale”, as in the title of the Grimms’ collection of *Kinder- and Hausmärchen*).<sup>179</sup> Though of nearly universal appeal, *Gösta Berlings saga* held particular appeal in Germany where, especially in the translation of Pauline Klaiber-Gottschau, it presented a “Germanized” Scandinavia, so much so that in 1944 it was provided as a *Frontbuch* for Nazi soldiers in Norway.<sup>180</sup> In the tale, on

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<sup>177</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1959 [French original first published in German 1957]), 78-79, 147.

<sup>178</sup> Eliade, *Rites and Symbols*, 123.

<sup>179</sup> “Hie hat die Mär’ ein Ende, das ist der Nibelungen Noth [=Nôt],” concludes Karl Simrock’s famous translation, *Das Nibelungenlied* (Berlin: Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1827), 223; Thomas Mann, *Die Forderung des Tages: Abhandlungen und Kleine aufsätze über Literatur und Kunst* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1986), 171; Larry W. Danielson, “The Uses of Demonic Folk Tradition in Selma Lagerlöf’s ‘Gösta Berlings saga’”, *Western Folklore* 34.3 (1975): 187-199.

<sup>180</sup> Jennifer Watson, “Scandinavian Literature in Nazi Germany: Selma Lagerlöf as One Example”, *Scandinavian Studies* 61.4 (2019): 482-99, 490-91.

Christmas Eve, Sintram “the malevolent mill owner... whose greatest joy is to dress up in the form of the foul fiend, with horns and tail and horse’s hooves and hairy body” comes dressed as the devil to drink and dance with the twelve pleasure-loving cavaliers—one for each of the twelve days of Christmas—at the local smithy and to extract from them an agreement to take over Ekeby for a year-long period of misrule, threatening the ruin of their souls next Christmas should they behave as sensible managers.<sup>181</sup> Among the dozens of books written by Dumézil, *Problème* was and remained Eliade’s favorite.<sup>182</sup> It is easy to see why Eliade would pair it, in his reverie and return to youth, with *Gösta Berlings saga*. *Problème* too is a wintertime book, a book of the twelve days, a book of rowdiness and misrule.

### 13. Year Zero

Playing on the title of Rossellini’s 1948 film *Germania anno zero*, Ginzburg has categorized (along with Benjamin’s *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Bloch’s *Historian’s Craft*, Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, and other works) both Eliade’s *Mythe* and De Martino’s *Mondo magico* as “writings from year zero”, works written, as it were, against a shared background of extreme danger and the imminent collapse of civilization. Yet while the others were all written in response to Fascism’s triumph, Eliade’s was written in response to its defeat. Eliade and De Martino start from a similar theme, the theme of crisis and

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<sup>181</sup> Lagerlöf, *The Saga of Gosta Berling*, trans. Paul Norlen (New York: Penguin, 2009), 27-38, quotation at 27.

<sup>182</sup> Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 269n6. Eliade and Dumézil remained friends since their first meeting in the Fall of 1943 in Paris; see Mircea Eliade, *The Portugal Journal*, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), entry of 16 November 1943, 97. Eliade Papers, boxes 81 and 82, folders 26 and 1 [Dumézil].

new beginnings, but, recall what Ginzburg had already written in *Storia notturna*, “the opposite conclusions were reached by De Martino in *Il mondo magico*”.<sup>183</sup>

In a provocative essay entitled “War-Time Connections”, Cristiano Grottanelli has argued that “a cultural ‘front’ of the totalitarian right existed, and in many different ways many intellectuals formed, or joined, and fought for, that front”, that this was a “vast European front” that included but was far from limited to former Nazis and Italian fascists, and that “the members of this cultural and trans-national Männerbund kept in contact, or re-contact each other, after what [the esoteric fascist Julius] Evola (and Eliade, in his Portuguese Journal, July 24, 1944) called *le déluge*.”<sup>184</sup> Grottanelli identified as members of this cultural front intellectuals like Carl Schmitt, Ernst Jünger, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle and Julius Evola, Dumézil and Eliade. Recent works, for example, on the Traditionalist right have enriched our understanding of this cultural front, but it remains largely submerged.<sup>185</sup> Perhaps we can add also Höfler and Wikander, who lived like Eliade into the 1980s, and regularly corresponded with other members of this far-right Männerbund. The *déluge* acknowledged by Evola and by Eliade, and felt by the Right cultural front, aligns well with Ginzburg’s idea of *year zero* books. *Mythe* is Eliade’s diluvian book, the book of the flood. “[D]eluge or flood puts an end to an exhausted and sinful humanity, and a new

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<sup>183</sup> Ginzburg “Mircea Eliade’s Ambivalent Legacy”, 318. A slightly different list of “year zero” books is established already in Ginzburg, “‘La fine del mondo’ di Ernesto de Martino”, *Quaderni storici* 40 (1979): 238-4, 239.

<sup>184</sup> Cristiano Grottanelli, “War-Time Connections: Dumézil and Eliade, Eliade and Schmitt, Schmitt and Evola, Drieu La Rochelle and Dumézil”, in Horst Junginger, ed., *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 303-14, 312-13; see also Grottanelli, “Mircea Eliade, Carl Schmitt, René Guénon, 1942”, *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 219.3 (2002):325-356.

<sup>185</sup> Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford and New York, 2004); Thomas Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*, trans. Christopher McIntosh with Hereward Tilton (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

regenerated humanity is born”, so Eliade writes in *Mythe*.<sup>186</sup> It is in the flood, in the myth of the Hebrews who for Eliade invented history, that history intersects with the flight from history.

When Eliade’s 1948 *Traité d’histoire des religions* appeared in Virginia Vacca’s translation in the Collana viola in 1954, Ernesto de Martino provided a short preface containing a powerful critique. Deeply and anxiously influenced by Croce, De Martino argues that the project of a “universal history” of religions had clearly failed and been abandoned, albeit on practical more than theoretical (historicist) grounds, giving way to a new typological approach marked by “modern restless irrationalism” and Jungian psychology. Eliade’s “history of religions” is not properly history at all, but typology or phenomenology, finding the same archetypes, images, and symbols across time. “It is undoubtedly true,” writes De Martino, “that the man engaged in the experience of the sacred believes that he is repeating mythical models, but the historian cannot reduplicate this experience by appealing to the theory of archetypes”. The “religious man in action” and the typologist like Eliade find common ground on precisely “the fundamental religious aspiration, i.e., the evasion of history”. If it is to remain vibrant and flexible, historicism must enter into “an intense polemical relationship with all the anti-historical and irrationalistic instances of contemporary culture”, and Eliade’s treatise offers the opportunity for just such an encounter.<sup>187</sup> De Martino knows that even the religious flight from history must be historicized. And he declares Eliade a “prisoner of anti-historical pretensions”.<sup>188</sup> Eliade, for his part, admits to being paralyzed by fear. “How can man tolerate the catastrophes and horrors of history—from

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<sup>186</sup> Eliade, “Cosmos and History”, 87.

<sup>187</sup> “Prefazione di Ernesto de Martino”, in Eliade, *Trattato di storia delle religioni* (Turin: Boringhieri, 1970 [1954]), xi-xiv, quotations at xiii-xiv. Compare also the sensitive pages of Alexandra Laignel-Lavastina, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionescu. L’oubli du fascisme: Trois intellectuels roumains dans la tourmente du siècle* (Paris: PUF, 2002), 420-39.

<sup>188</sup> Ernesto de Martino, reviews of three works by Eliade, *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 23 (1951/52), 148-155, 150 and 155.

collective deportations and massacres to atomic bombings—if beyond them he can glimpse no sign, no transhistorical meaning”.<sup>189</sup> And his is the fear, he made clear in an interview with Claude-Henri Rocquet, of the “no longer religious man” unable to make sense of the crimes history.<sup>190</sup>

When the 1954 English translation of Eliade’s *Myth of Eternal Return* was reprinted five years later, Arnaldo Momigliano reviewed it, along with Eliade’s *Birth and Rebirth*, on the pages of *Rivista storica italiana*. Like De Martino, Momigliano was troubled by Eliade’s flight from history: “The superiority that Eliade attributes to archaic man who is ‘free to annul his own history though periodic abolition of time and collective regeneration’ is the superiority of the drunk over the sober.” It is, we might add, the superiority of carnival over ordinary time. In Eliade’s declaration, “on the level of elemental religious experience, the beast of prey represents a higher mode of existence”, Momigliano is reminded of the recent “idealizations of the ‘furore teutonico’”.<sup>191</sup> The context, from Eliade’s own pages, is striking: “The Scandinavian berserker... shares in the sacred frenzy or furore (*wut*), behaves at once like a beast of prey and a shaman, he spreads terror all around him”.<sup>192</sup>

#### 14. Saturnalia

“Maskenfreiheit, Jude!” hört man in dumpfen, gefährlichen tönen. —Wilhelm Hauff, *Jud Süß* (1827)<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 151.

<sup>190</sup> Eliade, *La prova del labirinto: Intervista con Claude-Henri Rocquet* (Milan: Jaca, 1980), 118-19.

<sup>191</sup> Review of Eliade, *The Myth of Eternal Return*, reprinted in Momigliano, *Terzo contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, II (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1966), 755-758, 758.

<sup>192</sup> Eliade, *Birth and Rebirth*, 72.

<sup>193</sup> *W. Hauffs Werke*, vol. 3, *Novellen* (Leipzig and Vienna: Max Mendheim, 1909), 391.



There are clearly many kinds of ecstasy. One of them is rhetorical. Karl Meuli's style rarely achieves the ecstatic, but one place stands out in his works. In his short book *Schweizer Masken* from 1943—could it be a *year zero* book in its own way?—Meuli describes the liberation from taboos and laws that accompanies masking in uncharacteristically fervent prose. While the spectators and passive victims express their deep need for atonement and purification, the active player, the one who wears the mask, is transformed into a “higher order being” with “unparalleled power and freedom”:

Like the being he plays he is high above any human law. Only the sublime law of spirits applies to him. It releases him as a holy possessed being from all fetters and gives him the power to destroy and to punish, to take and to speak, to mock and to kiss whatever he pleases. For him all restrictions, all taboos are lifted. Everything that was otherwise forbidden and must be forbidden is now allowed. All the frustrating bonds of discipline and order are loosened. For once all his dark instincts of attack, of vengeance, of destruction are given free rein.<sup>194</sup>

[Figure 9] For Meuli, it is precisely this temporary abolition of rule—this “period of license”, this “safety-valve custom”, this “legal anarchy”—that kept the European masking rituals alive and vibrant, even, albeit in attenuated forms, into the days of his youth. Yet when Meuli wrote these words, Europe itself was in the midst of such a moment of anarchy and destruction. How could a reader not have registered this? Here is the unimaginable dark side of the carnivalesque, of Bakhtinian inversion; here is the most savage of charivaris; here is the feast of fools as orgy of violence. There is something profoundly sobering—“sober” in the sense, we think, that

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<sup>194</sup> Meuli, “Schweizer Masken und Maskenbräuche”, *GS*, 216.

Momigliano used in the quotation just above—in the words of Johann Huizinga, the scholar of the *homo ludens*:

The most fundamental characteristic of true play, whether it be a cult, a performance, a contest, or a festivity, is that at a certain moment it is *over*. The spectators go home, the players take off their masks, the performance has ended. And here the evil of our time shows itself. For nowadays play in many cases never ends and hence it is not true play.<sup>195</sup>

And there is something profoundly unsettling in those of Dumézil, when he speaks, in *Problème*, of the lupine transformation of the Neuri:

All these phenomena take place in an atmosphere of half-abandonment and half-amusement, where the game and the ritual, the bullying and the sanction, the *seen* and the *dreamed* have no borders...<sup>196</sup>

The border between temporary and permanent, feast time and ordinary time, exception and the rule, carnival and never-ending play has been erased.

In the same place in *Schweizer Masken*, Meuli asserts as a grand thesis that all Saturnalia-like festivals with their periods of license emerged originally from feasts of dead, and he adds a telling fact, a final ethnographic corroboration “of no small evidential value”: in some primitive societies such anarchy was also triggered by the death of a king.<sup>197</sup> Meuli had read a whole catalogue of these lawless transition periods in Albert Hermann Post’s *Afrikanische Jurisprudenz*. In Shewa, in Ethiopia, for example, “the king’s death is a signal for robbery, anarchy, and murder... There is no law until the new ruler is installed.”<sup>198</sup> We can also locate a European parallel in the work of the Bologna seminar organized by Ginzburg in 1983, whose findings were not more than adumbrated in a set of *premesse* to research in progress that

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<sup>195</sup> Huizinga, *In the Shadow of Tomorrow* (New York: Norton, 1936), 119.

<sup>196</sup> Dumézil, *Problème*, 49.

<sup>197</sup> Meuli, *GS*, 216. On the next page, Meuli cites Dumézil’s *Problème*, for the first and only time.

<sup>198</sup> Post, *Afrikanische Jurisprudenz: Ethnologisch-juristische Beiträge zur Kenntniss der einheimischen Rechte Afrikas*, vol. 1 (Oldenburg and Leipzig: Schulz, 1887), 161.

appeared in *Quaderni storici* four years later. There, under the title “Saccheggi rituali”, the seminar describes the violence and looting that accompanied the deaths and elections of popes, long understood as the expression of a kind of ancient and customary *ius spoli*, a right to take spoils, tied precisely to such moments of transition.<sup>199</sup> In its search for an explanation, the seminar first invokes E.P. Thompson’s notion of “moral economy”, declaring that these ritual sackings might share in the same “complex of values” that legitimized 18th-century English bread riots in the eyes of their perpetrators, namely the defense of traditional rights supported by popular consensus.<sup>200</sup> Then it suggests, in a move certainly apposite of the latter years of the *nouvelle histoire*, anthropology’s moment of transition *par excellence*: the “rite of passage”, which ritually bridges communal separation and aggregation, at moments like birth, puberty, marriage, and death. Though associated primarily with the systematizations of Arnold van Gennep, the rite of passage *in nuce* was first formulated in a 1907 article by Robert Hertz in the *Année sociologique* on the intermediary period between death and final burial, where Ginzburg and his seminar had read that the death of a chief can have “the effect of suspending temporarily the moral and political laws and of setting free the passions which are normally kept in check by the social order”, of creating—as Hertz calls it at the start of a long footnote full of examples from Fiji and other Pacific isles—“a sort of saturnalia”.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Ginzburg, “Ritual Pillages: A Preface to Research in Progress,” in *Microhistory and the Lost People of Europe: Selections from Quaderni Storici*, eds. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, trans. Eren Branch (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991 [Italian original 1987]), 20-41, 24. Compare also the interpretation of Maureen C. Miller, *The Bishop’s Palace: Architecture and Authority in Medieval Italy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 257-59.

<sup>200</sup> “Ritual Pillages”, 30-31.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-2, and see also E 38-39 and 56n25; SN 11 and 29n25. We quote Hertz, “A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death”, in Hertz, *Death & the Right Hand*, trans. Rodney and Claudia Needham (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1960), 29-88, 49 and 129n127. In an elegant essay Ginzburg has suggested three *opuscula* of Lucian of Samosata,

The “Saccheggi rituali” essay and its arguments are all but missing from *Storia notturna*. Ginzburg cites it only once, on the subject of “rites of passage” with near definitional liminality in relation to the liminal—“ambiguous, borderline”—condition of lepers and Jews in the first part of *Storia notturna*. Both are objects of Christian horror and revulsion, yet the Jews had been chosen by God in the Old Testament and lepers were embraced by saints like Louis IX and, of course, Francis: “the love evinced for [lepers] by Francis of Assisi,” Ginzburg observes, “is presented as a sublime testimonial of sanctity”.<sup>202</sup> The Jew presents a much more complex picture, but we can relatively easily follow the trail of the leper through the Ginzburgian *œuvre*, receding even farther back in time from *Storia notturna*, and arriving at a much earlier preoccupation for the historian. Ginzburg’s discussion of St. Francis’s “sublime testimonial” of love shown to lepers points directly (albeit silently in the historian’s apparatus) to Ginzburg’s extensive treatment of St. Francis in his long chapter “Folklore, magia, religione” written for the first, 1972 volume of the epochal *Storia d’Italia* edited by Ruggiero Romano and Corrado Vivanti for Einaudi.<sup>203</sup> There, the Umbrian saint, “God’s fool,” is cast as a figure who unites the Christian paradox and the carnivalesque paradox, most perfectly again in connection to the leper:

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printed together in the Summer of 1514, *Saturnalia, Cronosolon, id est Saturnalium legum lator*, and *Epistolae Saturnales*, as inspirations for More’s *Utopia*. Here is the essay’s darkly ironic concluding sentence: “Ancient rituals of inversion such as Saturnalia helped More to imagine a fictitious society in which gold and silver were used to make chamber pots and foreign ambassadors were mistakenly assumed to be slaves. The same rituals of inversion helped him to see, for the first time, a paradoxical, inverted reality: an island where sheep devoured human beings”; Ginzburg, “The Old World and the New Seen from Nowhere,” in Ginzburg, *No Island Is an Island: Four Glances at English Literature in a World Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 1-24, 24.

<sup>202</sup> E 38-39 and 56n25; SN 11 and 29n25.

<sup>203</sup> For the rapturous response to the first volume of the *Storia d’Italia*, see Walter Barberis, *Giulio Einaudi: Un ritratto* (Turin: Einaudi, 2011), 27.

“Sublimely carnivalesque is Francis’s kiss of the leper”.<sup>204</sup> Translated into French two years before the chapter appeared (and into Italian, for Einaudi, only ultimately in 1979), Bakhtin’s *Rabelais* clearly had the Ginzburg of the early 1970s under its potent spell.<sup>205</sup> The line between folklore and the carnivalesque “*in senso lato*” is in the chapter nearly always imperceptible. When the folkloric erupts into religion, it erupts *as* the carnivalesque. The land of Cockaigne or *Cuccagna* is carnivalesque, of course, but so “in the end, is the world of the [witches’] sabbath”. Yet the image of this particular upside-down world, with all its hallucinatory and even occasionally utopian elements, “duly institutionalized and codified in demonology treatises” and “spread by preachers and inquisitors,” becomes “the great religious alternative myth to peasant folklore”.<sup>206</sup> Another case of the sabbath easily *decifrato*? As seen through the Inquisitor’s eyes: Carnival. Wild Hunt. Shamanism. But as we have seen in Meuli better than anyone, they are far from distinct and discrete, bound not by gossamer threads but by thick skeins of myth and memory, and of violence.

The mostly general character of the Saturnalian violence described by Meuli and Hertz, neighbor against neighbor, must nonetheless be juxtaposed with the specificity of historical violence. For example, the history unearthed by Ginzburg’s seminar in “Saccheggi rituali”. Here is an example: “as the news of the election of Urban VII...spread through Bologna,” the seminar reports from archival documents, “a hundred or so people, for the most part ‘little children’ all shouting ‘to the Jews, to the Jews!’ headed toward the ghetto”, where they broke the windows

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<sup>204</sup> Ginzburg, “Folklore, magia, religione,” in *Storia d’Italia, I: I caratteri originali*, eds. Ruggiero Romano and Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1972), 603-676, quotation at 615.

<sup>205</sup> Mikhaïl Bakhtine, *L’œuvre de François Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen Âge et sous la Renaissance*, trans. Andrée Robel (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), cited along with a description of the “carnivalesque” in “Folklore, magia, religione” at 610. The Italian translation was by Mili Romano.

<sup>206</sup> Ginzburg, “Folklore, magia, religione,” 649-50.

and destroyed the furnishings of a synagogue.<sup>207</sup> Such examples are appallingly many. Here is another: In January of 1941 the Bucharest pogrom, which has been called “an act of ferocity perhaps unique in the history of the Holocaust”, was executed by the Iron Guard alongside their rebellion against the regime of Ion Antonescu.<sup>208</sup> The perpetrators were largely teenage boys and young men, among the ranks of both the Iron Guard and of those who spontaneously joined the rape, torture, murder, and wanton destruction.<sup>209</sup> Eliade had already left the country, but when, weeks later, his play *Iphigenia* was staged at Bucharest’s National Theater, it was widely understood to express the ideology of the Iron Guard. “I was told I didn’t have ‘dramatic vigor’—which is probably true,” Eliade wrote in his autobiography, as it was flop. “If *Iphigenia* has any merit, it must be sought in other directions”.<sup>210</sup> In his diary, Eliade’s one-time friend the Jewish intellectual Mihail Sebastian wrote: “Now, after five months at the helm [Antonescu took power in September 1940] and three days of revolt, after so much killing, arson, and pillage, you can’t say it is not relevant”. Juxtapose Eliade’s escape from history with Sebastian’s, “I cannot (and would not wish to) forget the horrors through which I have lived”.<sup>211</sup>

The pogrom in Bucharest was preceded by decades of youth violence against the Romanian Jews. Another example: In 1928, in the old city of Piatra Neamț, in the northeast of

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<sup>207</sup> “Ritual Pillages”, 27.

<sup>208</sup> Norman Manea, “Felix Culpa”, in Manea, *On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist* (New York: Grove Press, 1992), 91-121, 92n1.

<sup>209</sup> Matatias Carp, *Cartea neagră: Fapte și documente: Suferințele evreilor din România în timpul dictaturii fasciste, 1940–1944*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Diogene, 1996), 182 gives data for the perpetrators of one atrocity; Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2015) highlight the teenage participation in the Iron Guard.

<sup>210</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography, Volume 2: 1937-1960, Exile’s Odyssey*, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 83.

<sup>211</sup> Mihail Sebastian, *Journal, 1935-1944*, trans. Patrick Camiller ( ), 323 (12 February 1941), 316 (4 February 1941).

the country, a gang of students vandalized and desecrated the Jewish cemetery in the middle of the night after attending a masked ball.<sup>212</sup> The nature and meaning of the masks and of the *jeu du Cheval* studied by Dumézil had already a century ago, to the extent they remained at all, undergone remarkable additions, mutations, and transfigurations: “in Poland, Germany, Bohemia, and various countries of vigorous anti-Semitism,” he tells us, “the *Jew* has found his way into the masquerades, and the *Mare* is sometimes “his mare”; in the Balkans, the demon is often the *Arab*; in many places, doubtlessly out of malice, the mask is the *Hussar*, the *Constable*, the *Soldier*: these are the demons of our time”.<sup>213</sup> German has a word for the freedom of those who wear masks; it is called *Maskenfreiheit*, but with or without masks, somehow the moment of license always turns to violence—symbolic and literal—against the “other”, the weak, the Arab, the leper, the Jew.

## 15. Conclusions

Bakhtin appeared in English in 1968 and in French in 1970; Zemon Davis’s “Reasons of Misrule” was published in 1971 and her “Rites of Violence” in 1973; Thompson’s “Moral Economy” and “Rough Music” in 1971 and 1972. Bakhtin mixed with Levi-Strauss and with Van Gennep; ethnography mixed with literary criticism with the radical politics and perspectives of the student protest era. Thompson could rightly speak, as he did already in a 1970 letter to Zemon Davis, of a “Zeitgeist”.<sup>214</sup> Ginzburg’s “Charivari” essay, in its own eccentric way, shared in this Zeitgeist. Ginzburg’s 1972 “Folklore, magia, religione” chapter in *Storia d’Italia* did too. Even the “Saccheggi rituali” of the 1983 Bologna seminar did. *Storia notturna*, though it began

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<sup>212</sup> Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 59.

<sup>213</sup> Dumézil, *Problème*, 44.

<sup>214</sup> Walsham, “Rough Music and Charivari”, 255 (letter of 29 April 1970).

under a similar star, ultimately feels like a rejection of the *Zeitgeist* of the early 70s. Speaking of the path that took him from *I benandanti* to *Storia*, Ginzburg writes that he “encountered besides Jakob Grimm’s splendid pages [1835 to 1854] , the studies of W.H. Roscher [1896], M.P. Nilsson [1916-19], S. Luria [1927], V. Propp [1928 to 1946], K. Meuli [1933 to 1953], and R. Bleichsteiner [1952]”.<sup>215</sup> We could certainly add others to Ginzburg’s list, Rohde [1894], Leubuscher [1850] , even Weiser-Aall [1927] and Höfler [1934]. We have inserted dates for the particular or representative works, nearly all of them written in German, of these scholars. All were philologists, and most were deeply informed by or informed ethnology. Only a handful of the scholars we have discussed, like Dumézil [1929] or Eliade [1949], would not fit neatly with this group. De Blécourt’s choice to fixate on “folklorists of the interbellum” is clearly off the mark, but Ginzburg certainly found particular inspiration in a well-defined approach (ethnology of philology; philology of ethnology), from a particular region (Russia, German-speaking lands, Scandinavia), on a particular set of subjects (popular customs, myths, folklore, and fairy tales). Ginzburg continues: “In the end studies often conducted independently of one another converged”. A parallel phenomenon: to read deeply and carefully in Ginzburg’s list, as we have, is to be endlessly faced with real convergences, not apophenic or illusory ones. In the new preface he wrote for the 2017 Adelphi edition of *Storia notturna*, Ginzburg speaks of how his own research was “unknowingly oriented” by works of which he was unaware:

[R]esearch reproduces, on a reduced scale and in a simplified form, like an experiment, an experience that is shared by everybody: to enter a world that we have not chosen, mostly unknown to us, in which acting *also* (I will not say *above all*) means being acted upon.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> SN xxix; E 15.

<sup>216</sup> We quote the revised English version, Carlo Ginzburg, “Medals and Shells: On Morphology and History, Once Again”, *Critical Inquiry* 45 (Winter 2019): 380-395, 395.



We believe the journey from *I benandanti* to the “Charivari” essay to *Storia notturna* was for Ginzburg an experience of this sort. Ginzburg surely found himself in a web of ideas woven from the gossamer threads of citations, hidden borrowings, and unstated assumptions. Unknown to Ginzburg, his research for *I benandanti* was already being shaped, albeit without his knowing it, “through manifold filters”, by the studies that ultimately informed *Storia notturna*. Ideas from not yet known works do not always come packaged and labeled. We must remember that even Eliade’s politics, though there were rumors after the war, had to be “exposed” in the later 1970s, just as Dumézil’s were in the 1980s. We cannot demand of any scholar the retroactive clarity (the purity) of hindsight. The web was also a labyrinth, full of dead-ends and recursions and more than a single minotaur. We have followed (so many of us) the thread left by Ginzburg, so it is impossible to expect him to have escaped as smoothly as we have. Let all of this serve as a caveat.

In his 1981 essay “Charivari, associations juvéniles, chasse sauvage”, first delivered as a lecture in 1977, Ginzburg declared the bold intention of his book in progress, the book that would become *Storia notturna*: to prove that the Wild Hunt, which depicted the return of the dead, was the mythical background for the carnivalesque rituals of youth groups known across Europe and, following a Christian elaboration and demonization, also for the witches’ sabbath. For parallels with the benandanti, in this lecture-essay with a spare (at least by Ginzburg’s standards) apparatus, he cited Eliade’s essay “Some Observations on European Witchcraft” and Georges Dumézil’s 1929 *Le problème des centaures*. At this point, the “second dossier” described in his 1984 “Présomptions sur le sabbat” essay had barely begun to grow, in size and scope, beyond the limits it had reached for 1966’s *I benandanti*. In “Charivari” he also cited Meuli’s “Charivari” essay of 1953, where charivaris are linked to game hunting practices, but not

Meuli's works more apposite to the theme of the Wild Hunt (the 1933 "Maske" entry or the 1943 book *Schweizer Masken*), nor certainly to shamanism (1935's "Scythica").<sup>217</sup> Moreover, Ginzburg did not cite Meuli's essay from the two-volume edition of Meuli's *Gesammelte Schriften* but in its original form (in a festschrift for Franz Dornseiff), suggesting that Ginzburg may, at this point, not yet have become acquainted with Meuli's more powerful essays, with their intoxicating blend of philology and ethnology, their profound creativity, their morbidity, their melancholy, their strangeness. He certainly did not yet know how close Meuli had come, as he notes in "Présomptions", to seeing the whole picture that Ginzburg will see in the finished *Storia notturna*. For in Meuli, as we show depict in **Figure 2**, we find the bridge that connects Ginzburg's "Charivari" with its youth associations and Wild Hunt to Scythian Shamanism. He had even seen, Ginzburg notes, "the mortuary identity recognizable in masks and witches (or *masche*)". In "Charivari", as Bausinger noted, Ginzburg did not cite Höfler's *Kultische Geheimbünde*, which he had cited already in *I benandanti*, where he had found Old Thiess, and which he likely knew well enough at the time. Ginzburg's ultimate response, "I should have underlined this [that his argument is similar to Höfler's]—together with the fact that Höfler had in turn been preceded by Meuli," can only be read retroactively (after his full encounter with Meuli) and says little about Ginzburg's decision in the 1977 lecture (1981 article). We can rapidly dismiss De Blécourt's defamatory reading of the omission, for reasons stated above. Similarly Ginzburg was obviously not trying to take credit for Höfler's thesis; few historians are as generous and as thoughtful about laying out their intellectual influences as Ginzburg. So why did Ginzburg choose not to cite Höfler?

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<sup>217</sup> Ginzburg, "Charivari, associazioni giovanili", 176n26.

In the 1984 essay “Présomptions”, wherein he lays out the then-current state of the *Storia notturna* project, Ginzburg continues to stress the importance of “ritual associations of young men, also mentioned in contemporary folklore”, which are linked to werewolves in the structure of his research.<sup>218</sup> He also acknowledges the primacy (in chronological terms and abundance of material) of the first part of “first dossier”, i.e., evidence about the Wild Hunt, usually led by Odin another male deity. Although their *disiecta membra* may still be found all through *Storia notturna* as it finally appeared in 1989, and though its astonishingly rich and profound apparatus still allows the dedicated reader to piece them together, the male associations (*Männerbünde*) and the Wild Hunt have been radically demoted in importance if not largely erased, along with them the special days around Christmas, Odin, festivals of inversion, rough justice, masked anarchy and the right to rapine. In their place Ginzburg’s mention of the “not only intellectual implications” of the whole Wild Hunt theme. In *Storia*, Bausinger’s critique, that the “Charivari” essay recapitulated (the Nazi) Höfler’s discredited thesis without citing him, would only be another prompt for Ginzburg to openly grapple, just as the editors of the *Collana viola* had grappled, with a problem deeply embedded in the chosen subjects and themes, i.e., one which were “a very fertile ground” for politicized and politically-compromised scholarship. As he replied to De Blécourt in 2016, these were subjects and themes treated by “scholars with a more or less explicit Fascist and Nazi orientation” whose politics “usually affected... both their approach and their results”. Though far from the only exception, Meuli, who staked out an anti-Nazi position already in the late 1930s and whose own wartime (*year zero?*) essays reveal a deep if melancholy humanism, is a crucial exception. By now this should be clear: in the early years of work on *Storia*, Ginzburg was unclear about how to deal with this issue. In “Présomptions”,

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<sup>218</sup> Ginzburg, “Deciphering”, 137nA4.

Höfler is still an accepted authority, Ginzburg argues, unlike Margaret Murray. And Dumézil's Indo-European Tripartite model remains an important referent. Later, there is still something worth saving in Höfler, as in Murray, and it is important to note that Meuli had arrived at the Höfler's basic conclusions first. Ginzburg was not alone in probing these issues.

By 1984, as Ginzburg notes in the opening line of his essay on Dumézil and Höfler, “Mitologia germanica e nazimo,” “a reevaluation of the so-called culture of the right [had] been underway for a number of years now”.<sup>219</sup> The phrase *cultura di destra* certainly points to Furio Jesi's work of the same name and the denunciations of Eliade that appeared in Italy in the late 1970s. This “reevaluation” occurred, in fact, during the early stages of the writing of *Storia notturna*, after Ginzburg had clearly found himself deeply impacted by the research of sometimes Nazi and often right-wing philologists, ethnologists, and folklorists working on the nexus of issues we have described in this essay. Ginzburg's famous “Mitologia germanica” essay, which Bruce Lincoln calls a “fierce critique” and one that helped to spur his conversion, is—as Molho rightly noted—marked by “reticence”. We would go a step farther. It is a tacit criticism of Jesi, then already tragically deceased, and an explicit one of the Italian Left's “reevaluation” of the “so-called” *cultura di destra*. Just as De Martino decried the “criticisms of the ‘orthodox’” against the Collana viola, Ginzburg decries the “dogmatism of the left” for having indiscriminately declared certain problems and questions off limits. The essay speaks of “rampant ideologies”—implied: Right *and* Left—and ultimately declares that only “internal criticism” can separate “racist trash” and “propagandistic intrusions” from “serious research” and “scholarly contributions”. Both may found in the *cultura di destra*.<sup>220</sup> Margaret Murray was not a

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<sup>219</sup> Ginzburg, “Germanic Mythology”, 126.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 145.

Nazi, Höfler was, yet the theories of both are susceptible to the same critique, both share “an equally indefensible assumption, though founded on totally different ideological presupposition”, namely the confusion of myths for rites.<sup>221</sup> The same could be said also for Toaff. The process of internal criticism is not easy: “even the parallels suggested by Dumézil between the SA and the berserker in the Icelandic sagas”, i.e., even Dumézil at his most sympathetic to Nazism, “can bring important elements to light”. This, Ginzburg writes, is a “Solomonic and disappointing conclusion”; so too is Ginzburg’s whole formulation of the problem of questions and answers.<sup>222</sup> But it is better than declaring profound questions out of bounds only because they have been asked by the culture of the right. The historian must be free to ask questions with “treacherous, disturbing implications”, about subjects like the diffusion of Indo-European myth and even about the connection between biology and culture.

In this essay we have hinted at what an alternative version of *Storia notturna*, one still revolving around the Wild Hunt with its “not only intellectual implications”, might have looked like by describing in some detail a handful of works of Höfler, Meuli, Dumézil, and Eliade insofar as they touch upon the Wild Hunt and related themes that receded into the background in *Storia notturna* as it ultimately exists. These themes overlap with Eliade’s idea of a flight from history. Beyond this idea, this quintessential *year zero* idea, Eliade—“boring Eliade”—held little obvious interest for Ginzburg. Yet in an astonishing way—one obviously inflected by Eliade’s Rightist politics and by his lasting friendships with Dumézil, Höfler, Wikander, and others, in what Grottanelli called the “cultural front” of the Right—Eliade combined and distilled the ideas of the others, with constant reference to *Le problème des centaures* and *Kultische Geheimbunde*,

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 135.

and even to Meuli's extraordinary essays. As in the critique presented by Lot-Falck, Eliade "regrouped" these ideas into a kind of vague but coherent whole. But little active regrouping had been necessary. It is nearly impossible to investigate one of these themes without finding one's way to the others. They form a nexus of intertwined and mutually attractive ideas, just as these scholars were mutually intertwined and attracted to one another.

The easy conclusion is here the wrong conclusion. Bruce Lincoln, the convert, "reads" Ginzburg incorrectly because he reads him, in the first instance, politically. He sees a "fierce critique" of the Right in "Mitologia germanica". He cannot accept that Ginzburg's essential difference with Höfler is methodological, on the grounds of myths and rites, rather than political. Let us not make the same mistake. The Ginzburg of "Charivari", of the period before the "reevaluation of the so-called culture of the right", excludes Höfler because he was a Nazi. Soon after, he finds that Meuli—anyway a better and more creative scholar than Höfler—allows him to save the ideas he likes from Höfler. Meuli had gotten there first, and he had distanced himself from Nazism in a position and at a time of great difficulty. But the wider reevaluation, guided by a dogmatism of the Left he no longer shares, pushes Ginzburg to personally reevaluate these questions. Ginzburg's reevaluation results in the questions and answers framework of "Mitologia germanica". This then demands of Ginzburg a process of "internal criticism", criticism from within the very disciplines and problems defined by the Right. He cannot stop at the boundary lines drawn by Jesi or the orthodox Left. De Martino had, in his way, come to a similar place. "Racist trash" can be discarded with ease, but serious scholarship by men of the Right cannot. Here is another insight of Molho's, admittedly small but important. In 1986 Ginzburg had declared, "I am deeply against every kind of Derrida trash", in an interview. Molho notes, "[i]nterestingly, he had used exactly the same expression (*spazzatura*=trash) when, two years before [in "Mitologia

germanica”], he referred to German racist propaganda in the 1930s.”<sup>223</sup> It is not enough to invoke political labels and go no further. Although Ginzburg had already wrestled with the problem of myths and rites before *Storia notturna*, it becomes there a crucial tool of post-ideological discernment in the fraught and forbidden fields he entered in *Storia notturna*, one as applicable to the Nazi Höfler as to Margaret Murray as to Ariel Toaff, one that echoes across all of Ginzburg’s works.

Ginzburg, unsurprisingly even with his protestations, returned to these issues again in relation to Eliade about a decade ago in an essay about the Romanian’s “ambivalent legacy”. This essay must be read side-by-side with “Mitologia germanica”. Like the call for “internal criticism” in “Mitologia germanica”, Ginzburg in the Eliade essay calls for “critical distance” in the face of a profound ambivalence, an ambivalent much larger than Eliade, in which “Left, Right, Enlightenment, and anti-Enlightenment clash, criss-cross, and overlap on specific issues”. Just as he rejected “rampant ideologies” in “Mitologia”, in the Eliade essay Ginzburg declares that “the age of simple dichotomies is over”.<sup>224</sup> On this point he refers to a recent op-ed written by his friend Adriano Sofri. “It was once enough to have your name written in an ideological register,” wrote Sofri, “and the answers to individual questions came automatically as a result. Those were good time, eh? Now you have to think again for yourself from the beginning every time.”<sup>225</sup> To reject the Left/Right dichotomy and rethink every issue *daccapo ogni volta* is the Herculean challenge of every ethical being in our ambivalent present, and it is at the heart of Ginzburg’s ethical turn. Among its many exceptional qualities—and it is, without question, a

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<sup>223</sup> Molho, “Carlo Ginzburg”, 139.

<sup>224</sup> Ginzburg, “Mircea Eliade’s Ambivalent Legacy”, in *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach & Mircea Eliade*, eds. Christian K. Wedemeyer and Wendy Doniger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 307-32, 322.

<sup>225</sup> Adriano Sofri, “Il doppio coraggio di un scrittore”, *La Repubblica*, 14 October 2014.

masterpiece of modern historical writing—*Storia notturna* is an autobiographical work in profound, sometimes deeply submerged ways: it is a testimony to Ginzburg's ethical and political development. As such, it is fitting to conclude with the kinds of ethical choices Ginzburg makes in *Storia notturna*, with the problems of ecstasy and extraordinary time, with Saturnalia and escape from history, with the problem of myth and history.

Ecstasy. If you dig deep enough into any of Meuli's great essays, you will find humans coming to terms with the death of humans and other animals. If you dig deep enough anywhere in *Storia notturna*, you find the ecstatic journey to the beyond. Ecstasy, *ekstasis*, being outside oneself. The cataleptic voyage links the witch to the werewolf to the shaman to the animal mask and on and on. As we have seen, though, ecstasy can be capacious to the point of being a kind of asemic magnet, and a pretext for regrouping unrelated themes. Grimm's ecstasy is not Höfler's, Eliade's is not Ginzburg's. We propose one possible degrouping: the ecstasy of one who lies prone, fixed, asleep, cataleptic vs. the ecstasy of one who is up, awake, active, possessed. Think of Odin: "his body lay as if it was asleep or dead" and he travelled as an animal "in an instant to distant lands". But "his men went without mail and were wild as dogs or wolves... That is called berserk fury". For Ginzburg the latter is, in truth, a species of the former. Sleeping ecstasy is to waking ecstasy as myths are to rites. A four-person "discussion" of *Storia notturna* first held at the University of Siena in 1989 appeared in 1991 on the pages of *Quaderni di storia*. The original intervention of Cristiano Grottanelli is disappointingly confused and wrongheaded, but later before publication he added two points worth mentioning. First, of Ginzburg's then-just-released book, *Il giudice e lo storico*, written in defense of Sofri, who had been convicted and imprisoned in relation to the 1972 murder of a police officer when he was leader of the Leftist group Lotta Continua: "This book sheds a lot of light on the spirit in which *Storia notturna* was



written”. Second, he compares Eliade and Ginzburg on witchcraft: “among the differences, there is one that is fundamental: Eliade’s tendency to believe it was possible that witches actually indulged in sexual orgies and other more serious anomic behaviors... [to which] tendency is opposed the whole Ginzburghian ‘decipherment’ of the sabbath, which is purely ‘*innocentista*’”.<sup>226</sup> *Innocentista* has no good equivalent in English, but naturally it means one who believes in or argues for the innocence of someone accused of a crime. Grottanelli’s juxtaposition of Ginzburg’s belief in Sofri’s innocence with his belief in the witches’ innocence comes with a smirk, surely, but we accept the comparison in earnest. To make the case for the falsely accused is an act of courage and truth. Following this conceit to its end, Eliade and Höfler and Dumézil are in the ranks of the *colpevolisti*, attributing ritual reality to the mythic and waking reality to the cataleptic. But the conceit rapidly breaks down: what for Ginzburg are crimes might for them be laudable or necessary deeds.

Extraordinary Time. All throughout this essay we have highlighted the theme of ordinary time and of extraordinary time, which, in Frazer’s words, “breaks the smooth surface of ordinary existence”. The times when the dead return, when law and order are subverted, when history is escaped. These ideas appear here and there in *Storia notturna*, but they also serve as a kind of invisible and unaddressed referent all through the scholarly apparatus, linking the New Year festivals of Dumézil’s *Problème* to Höfler’s ecstatic death cult to Meuli’s Saturnalias to Eliade’s escape from history to the fascist *déluge* as another kind of *year zero*. Many other similar chains may be found, but this one lets us think about why we have the *Storia notturna* we do and not the alternative one we have imagined. We have also, at the start of this set of conclusions, spoken of how Ginzburg, in *Storia notturna*, left behind the *Zeitgeist* that marked

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<sup>226</sup> Cristiano Grottanelli, intervention in “Discussione su ‘Storia notturna’ di Carlo Ginzburg”, Quaderni di storia 103 114, 116.

the “Charivari” essay and its themes and preoccupations: the carnivalesque, the rite of passage, the rowdy youth group, the period of misrule, popular justice. These themes overlap with and nurture those of Dumézil, Höfler, Meuli, and Eliade and vice-versa. The politics of Zemon Davis and Thompson and of their famous essays is a vast gulf away from the “so-called culture of the right”. Yet the overlap is real and has deep roots in extraordinary time. We have tried, clumsily but as well as we could, to show above why Ginzburg might have rejected or played down these ideas. The period of license finds the same old victims. The carnival becomes the ritual of violence. The return to ordinary time is an embrace of oblivion over history.

Here we have been speaking of politics again, but the kind of politics that labels cannot capture or predetermine, the kind that everyone must think and rethink for herself from the beginning every time.

## 16. Postscript

On Christmas Eve in 1951 an effigy of Santa Claus was condemned in the square in front of the Dijon Cathedral, hanged, and then burned as a heretic. A controversy arose in the French press, and the reactionary Dijon clergy was largely chided for the stunt. In response, even Claude Lévi-Strauss penned an article, “Le Père Noël supplicié”, in which he attempted to sketch the development of the Santa Claus figure.<sup>227</sup> “Although written in a seemingly jocose tone,” Ginzburg wrote of the article in *Storia notturna*, it “poses in a very compressed form various decisive questions”, questions only hinted at by Ginzburg, questions related to all the issues at

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<sup>227</sup> In *Les Temps modernes* 77 (1952): 1572–90; we quote Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Santa Claus Burned as a Heretic, 1952”, in Lévi-Strauss, *We Are All Cannibals and Other Essays*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 1-18.

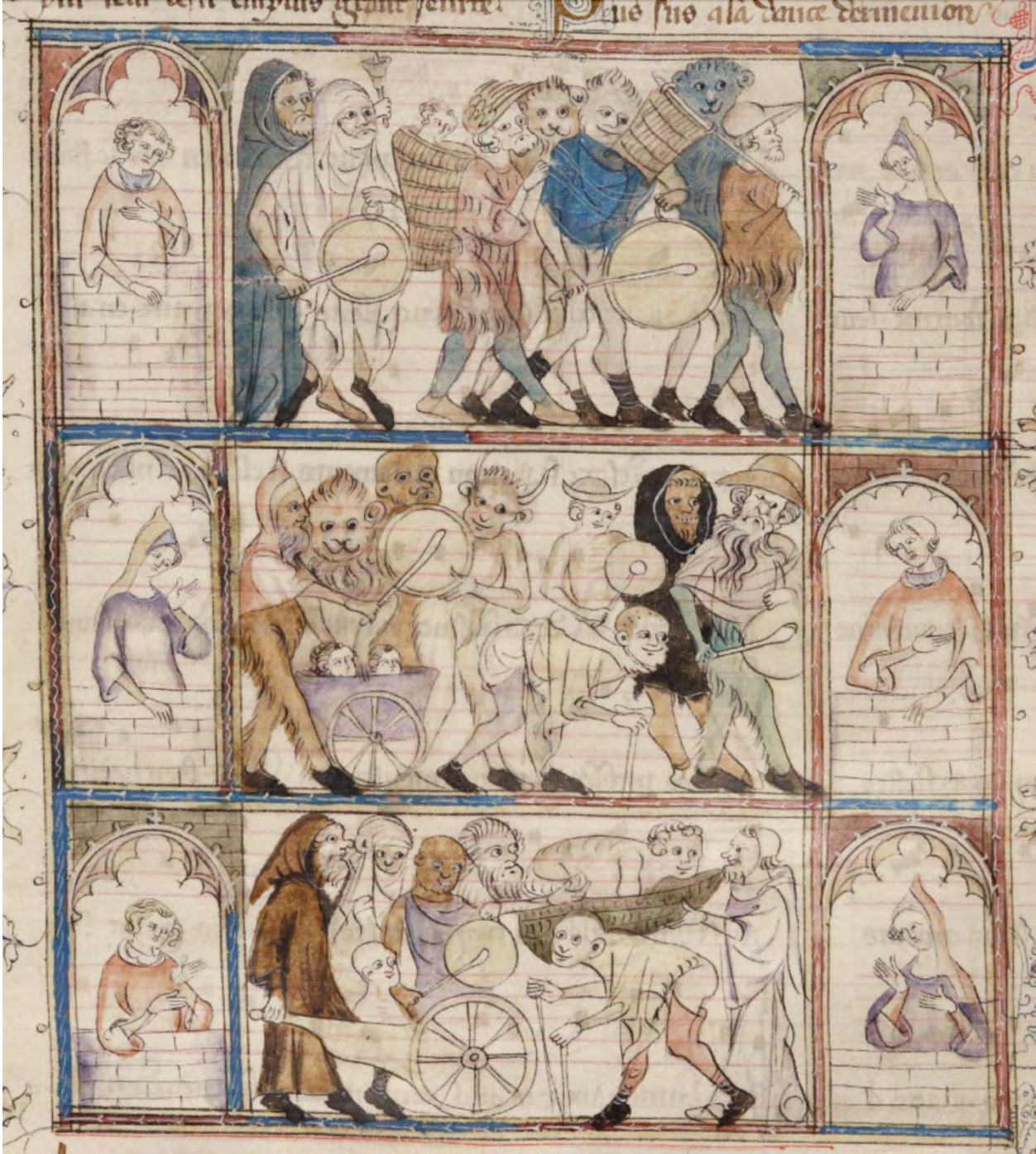
the heart of this paper.<sup>228</sup> Among the many ways to read Lévi-Strauss's article is, we would argue, as a kind of unexpected tonic for Meuli's manias and melancholies. "We no longer judge it useful, in order to clear our accounts with death, to allow it periodically to subvert law and order": for Lévi-Strauss this is a sign of improving relations with the dead.<sup>229</sup> Someday perhaps we will no longer judge it useful clear our own accounts with ourselves and with our fellow human beings by periodically escaping history and evading our pasts. And this will surely be a sign of improving relations with the living.

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<sup>228</sup> E 198n11, SN 178n11.

<sup>229</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Santa Claus Burned", 16 and 17.

FIGURE 1: A charivari or the Mesnie Hellequin, miniature from the *Roman de Fauvel*, early 14<sup>th</sup> century, BNF Français 146, ff.1r-45r, 36v.



A schematic based partly on Carlo Ginzburg, "Présomptions sur le sabbat", *Annales HSS* 39.2 (1984): 341-354, note 13 at 352-53.

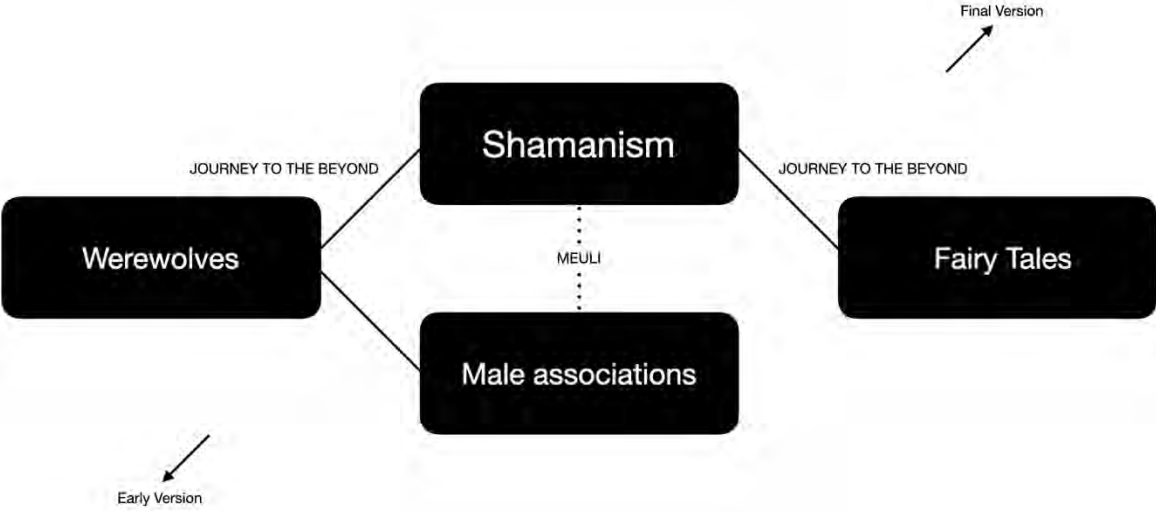


Figure 3: Two of the Torslunda plates, at bottom perhaps a depiction of Odin and one of the úlfhéðnar, from Oscar Montelius, “Ett fynd från slutet af jernaldern”, *Kongl. Vitterhets Historie och Antiquitets Akademiens Månadsblad* 1.6 (1872): 89–91. Otto Höfler had it redrawn from this source for inclusion in *Kultische Geheimbünde*.

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funna i grafvar från nämnda tid, under det dylika svärd icke varit använda under någon annan period. Fig. 40 visar i  $\frac{1}{6}$  af verkliga storleken ett svärd från vikinga-



38.

tiden, som år 1870 hittades i Östra härad af Småland, å Näfvelsjöns efter sänkning torrlagda botten (Inv. 4388).<sup>1</sup>



39.

Detta svärd har samma trekantiga knapp öfverst på fästet, samma korta, raka parerstång och samma breda

<sup>1</sup> Nedre delen af klingan saknades, men är å teckningen tillsatt efter andra fullständiga svärd. Fästet är prydt med beläggning af brons.

Figure 4: Annual parade of the Roitschäggätä (young men with monstrous masks) of the Lötschental Valley, 1977 Swiss Postage Stamp

NEED RIGHTS



Figure 5: "Walking with the Mare", drawn by Fr. Kaček, from Čeněk Zíbrt, "Chození s klíbnou (s koněm)", *Český Lid* 2.3 (1893): 349-379, 349.

Č. Zíbrt: Chození s klíbnou (s koněm).

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Čís. 1. Obcházka s klíbnou v Kostelci u Vorlíka. Kreslil Fr. Kaček.

## II.

Napsal Dr. Čeněk Zíbrt.

Otiskuji v I. stati výklad p. Soukupa o chození s klíbnou beze změny. Zároveň však v této stati připojuji k němu výklad svého stanoviska o téže věci. Od té doby, kdy jsem uveřejnil „Staročeské výroční obyčeje“ (1889), pokračoval jsem přirozeně v práci, jejíž výsledky jsem podal v knize jmenované, a přibýlo mi teda dalším soustavným studiem hojně látky nové, z pramenů staročeských i z literatur slovanských a cizích, látky, které jsem při sestavování „Staročeských obyčejů“ neznal a znáti nemohl, poněvadž příslušná literatura odborná jak slovanská, tak cizí v knihovnách pražských většinou, zejména pokud se týká doby novější, není uložena. Jako skoro každá stať v chystaném 2. vydání „Staroč. obyčejů“ vzrostla a vzrůstá značně doplňky materialu staročeského i srovnávacího, slovanského a cizího, tak tomu také s kratičkou poznámkou o „klíbně“, o přestrojení v koně před Třemi králi, kterážto poznámka tuto vzrůstá v celý článek, v přípravnou studii, ve které bych se rád pokusil při-



Figure 6: “A centaur of the earliest type” from Joseph Clark Hoppin, “Three Argive Lekythi in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston”, *American Journal of Archaeology* 4.4 (1900): 441-457, plate 6.

AMERICAN JOURNAL OF ARCHAEOLOGY, SECOND SERIES VOL. IV (1900) PLATE VI



ARGIVE LEKYTHI IN THE BOSTON MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS: NO. III

Figure 7: A Hobby-Horse in Padstow from Richard Wolfram, "Robin Hood und Hobby Horse", *Wiener prähistorische Zeitschrift* 19 (1932): 357-374 362.

— 362 —

horse. Auch hier verbirgt sich der Träger hinter einer grotesken Maske. Die Ausführenden sind Seeleute und haben genaue Bestimmungen zu befolgen. Drei Tage lang, von 6 Uhr früh bis 10 Uhr abends, hat der Umzug zu dauern, der immer von einem bestimmten Kreuzweg seinen Ausgang nehmen muß und kein Jahr ausfallen darf. Alles Züge, die auf kultische Bedeutsamkeit hinweisen. In *Revesby*, Lincolnshire, trat das Hobby horse am 20. Oktober zusammen mit den Schwertänzern auf (noch 1887). Auch hier hatte der Attrappenreiter, ganz wie in *Abbots Bromley*, Pfeil und Bogen in der Hand. Wenn das Datum des Aufzuges auch etwas vorverlegt erscheint, so heißt es doch im Text:



Abb. 1: Hobby-Horse in Padstow in Cornwall.

„Still we are all brave jovial boys  
And take delight in Christmas Toys.“

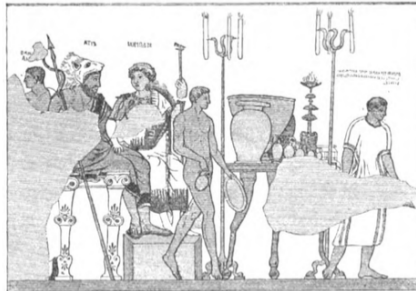
Die alte Aufführungszeit war also auch hier offenbar Weihnachten. Bereits zu einer Schauffigur bei besonderen Festen (Königs Geburtstag etc.) ist the *Salisbury „Hob Nob“* geworden, das zusammen mit der Prozessionsfigur eines Riesen, ähnlich dem *Lungauer Samson*, auftritt.

Ziemlich reich vertreten ist auch der andere Typus, wo der Reiter wegfällt und nur das Pferd dargestellt wird. Das hauptsächlichste Rückzugsgebiet ist *Kent*, das Land des weißen Felsenpferdes, das einst *Hengist* und *Horsa* mit ihren Mannen besiedelten. *Pery Maylam* hat den Weihnachtsumzügen des

Figure 8: Drawing of the Etruscan Hades with a wolf cap at the Tomba Golini, from W.H. Roscher, *Das von der "Kynanthropie" handelnde Fragment des Marcellus von Side* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1896), 47.

D. VON D. KYNANTHROPIE HANDELNDE FRAGMENT D. MARCELLUS V. S. 45

(Psyche S. 180 Anm. 1) hat vermuthet, dass das Wolfsfell des Lykas völlige Wolfsgestalt, wie sie der athenische Heros Lykos zeigt (Harpokrat. unter δεκάζων), andeuten sollte. Wenn auch Menschen, namentlich Krieger, z. B. Dolon<sup>123)</sup>, der Herold der Nergobriger bei Appian (Hisp. 48), Romulus (b. Propert. 5, 10, 20 galea lupina; vgl. Verg. A. 1, 275) und die römischen velites (nach Polyb. 6, 22 λυκεία) eine κωνή oder λυκῆ<sup>124)</sup> tragen, so ist es sehr wahrscheinlich, dass man einer solchen Kopfbedeckung oder Bekleidung eine apotropäische<sup>125)</sup>, den Gegner durch Zauber bannende oder erschreckende Wirkung zuschrieb<sup>126)</sup>. Bekanntlich



Grabgemälde von Orrieto, Gesamtansicht.



Hades mit κωνή von dem Gemälde von Orrieto.

123) Vgl. z. B. die Petersburger Vase nr. 879: 'Dolon, welcher über einen kurzen Chiton ein Wolfsfell so gezogen hat, dass es den Kopf sowohl als auch die Arme und Beine bedeckt! Vielleicht wollte Dolon mit seiner λυκῆ den Eindruck eines Werwolfs machen; vgl. [Eur.] Rhes. 208 ff. Vgl. übrigens auch Il. K 334. 459.

124) Nach Vergil A. 7, 688 trugen die ältesten Krieger Italiens lupi de pelle galeros. Mehr bei KELLEN, Thiere d. class. Alt. S. 160 f.

125) O. JAHN, Ber. d. S. Ges. d. Wiss. 1855, S. 57 ff. 1854, S. 47 ff. Vgl. auch den Wolfskopf oder Wolf als apotropäisches Schildzeichen auf den Vasen Berlin Nr. 1850 (FURTWÄGLER), München Nr. 100, Petersburg 1682 u. 657. Ebenso kommt auch der Hund als Schildzeichen vor: München Nr. 394. 586. Petersburg 828. 848.

126) Vgl. Veget. 2, 16: omnes antesignani vel signiferi, . . . accipiebant

Figure 9: Daniel Nikolaus Chodowiecki, “Mask Law (*Das Maskenrecht*)”, Klassik Stiftung, Weimar.

