Gnostic Runology – Historical Context 2

http://www.GnosticStudies.org/Runes

German Theosophy and the *Völkisch* Movement

The intermingling of Theosophical Movement and the *Völkisch* Movement in the 1890s leads to a unique environment. With the *Völkisch* Movement, we have an interest in the Nordic Mythology, Religion, and the Runes. With the Theosophical Movement, we see an interest in Eastern Philosophy, Ancient Mythology, Comparative Religion, Yoga, Fakirism, Esotericism and Occultism.

Now these two start to blend in a way that allows the Runes (from the *Völkisch*) to connect with the Mystical (from Theosophy). Later, we'll see how Reichenbach's idea of the "Odic force" will also merge to sustain the Rune Exercises (the study of which is the object of this Course).

The first German Theosophical Society was established in July of 1884 by Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden. Between 1886 and 1895 he published the monthly periodical *Die Sphinx [The Sphinx]*. This had a small version of the Theosophical logo (which included a swastika) under the Sphinx's face, but was hard to see.

Soon thereafter, in Vienna, a theosophical society was founded in 1887 (who's members included Franz Hartmann and a young Rudolf Steiner). In 1893, Hartmann began a periodical of his own, which was the first German publication to clearly use the Theosophical swastika on its cover.

Hartmann's periodical *Lotusblüten [Lotus Blossoms]* and was published for seven years. During this time, Hartmann became president of another German Theosophical Society (which was a branch of the International Theosophical Brotherhood) when it was established in 1896, while American theosophists (including William Q. Judge) was traveling through Europe. A little later, Rudolf Steiner was made general secretary of this same branch in 1902.

Hartmann's magazine seems to have motivated another German, Paul Zillmann, to found the *Neve Metaphysische Rundschau [New Metaphysical Review]* in 1896. According to the Editors of 'The International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals' (IAPSOP):

> "The journal was a who's who of German metaphysics and mysticism and of contemporary New Thought. It had very close relationships with the English-speaking world, especially with the Metaphysical Magazine..."

It published articles from Rama Prasad, H.P. Blavatsky (and other Theosophists), as well as up-and-coming German authors such as Peryt Shou and Guido von List (whose books Zilllmann also published).



Zillmann was a leading German Theosophist and published translations of many English-language Theosophical texts in German (often translated by his wife). **In this magazine, a *Völkisch* article is published (in 1906) that becomes somewhat of a focal point for Runic studies in German speaking countries...**

Summary of Timeline:

1884 – First German Theosophical Society established by Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden
1885 – German Theosophical Magazine "The Sphinx" is published (also by Hübbe-Schleiden) incorporating a Theosophical logo with a swastika
1887 – Second German Theosophical Society is established (members include Franz Hartmann and Rudolf Steiner)
1893 – Another German Theosophical Magazine "Lotus Blossoms" is published (by Hartmann) also incorporating a Theosophical logo with a swastika, this time more prominent
1896 – A Third German Theosophical Magazine "New Metaphysical Review" is published (by Paul Zillmann) also incorporating a Theosophical logo with a swastika.
1906 – "New Metaphysical Review" publishes Guido von List's article *The Mystery/Secret of the Runes [Das Geheimnis der Runen]* in multiple parts, beginning in January.

A Theosophical Critique of Guido von List's Article

In the June 1906 issue of *The Theosophist* (an English language Theosophical magazine that was published in India), some other Theosophical magazines are reviewed, including those published in French, Spanish and German languages. The relevant German magazine review follows:

> *Neue Metaphysische Rundschau*, edited by Paul Zillmann, Berlin-Lichterfelde, Band XIII., Heft 1. This journal has, in consequence of its solid contents, conquered a unique position in Germany, being the only journal connected with Theosophy *[1] which has many subscribers other than Theosophists, and the only one which may be found in the reading-room of almost every university.
>
> The first number of the new set is dedicated to *Eduard von Hartmann*, the greatest of the living European philosophers...
>
> The second article, "The Secret of the Runes," by Guido von List, is likewise highly interesting, although too bold, as seems to us, in many of its particulars. The runes are said to be hieroglyphs of the original, not Germanic, but Indo-European language, and an explanation of the current ones of them (besides which there exist many hundred used now as ornaments or auspicious signs only) is given from the "Hâvamâl," one of the most wonderful books of the rich Old-Icelandic literature, the main contents of which are, so to say, the Mahâbodhi of Odhin (Wuotan), *i.e.*, the knowledge attained to by the dying father of the gods, at the time of the beginning *pralaya* of this world, ("Götterdämmerung") *that all life is a sacrifice brought to himself by himself*. The word "runes" (*rûnir rûnar*) is often used in exactly the sense of the Indian *mantra*. It may be noticed here that the parallels to old Indian literature are so numerous and close, not only in the "Hâvamâl," but in the whole Old-Icelandic literature (which is the only pure, *i.e.*, un-Christian, Old-Germanic literature preserved to us) that a complete, systematical comparison of the two literatures would certainly evoke the greatest surprise in Europe as well as India, and would, probably, give the proof to every unprejudiced mind that the Germanic nations (Scandinavians, Danes, Germans, etc.), if they had been spared the disturbing influence of the Christian Church, would have developed to the spiritual height of India in the "dark" middle age.

Despite the Theosophical author's critique of G. v. List's article as being "too bold", G. v. List's acclaim in the German-speaking world and especially in *Völkisch* circles was pretty significant. However, before Guido von List's popularity, we have some very interesting observations on the Runes by a man named Friedrich Fischbach (1839-1908), a German textile designer by profession.

[1] * It is the organ of an "Independant Association for Metaphysics and Theosophy" called, "Wald-Loge."