

“Nordic Studies” in National Socialist Germany - A Possible Career Path for Swedish Academics⁺

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Introduction

The Swedish scholar Åke Ohlmarks was one of the active academics founding an institute for comparative religion at the University of Greifswald in 1944. In an article dealing with the founding of the institute Fritz Heinrich suggested that Ohlmarks took advantage of the “special opportunities” existing for Scandinavian scholars in the Third Reich.¹ Although not said out straight Heinrich considered the fact that Ohlmarks was Swedish as well as the fact that his research was located in the field of Old Norse religion as helpful for his career. In a later article I proved Heinrich right as I analyzed the career of Ohlmarks and the political and scientific context he moved within during the national socialist dictatorship, hence explaining how his Swedishness and research interests helped him to the post of director of the shortlived institute in Greifswald.² In this paper I will put the scientific career of Åke Ohlmarks in a broader context and compare his career with those of Alexander Mutén and Stig Wikander, two other Swedish academics active in national socialist Germany. This comparison of careers has two aims. One is to discuss the changed scientific and political framework and the ideological conflicts within the national socialist state and their importance for scientific careers in general and of the three scholars mentioned above in particular. The other is to point to different structural and biographical factors in order to explain the interest of Mutén, Wikander and Ohlmarks in an academic career in national socialist Germany.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first part consists of a short description of the academic field of nordic studies and the impact of National Socialism on German academia, the second of three short descriptions of the careers of Mutén, Wikander and Ohlmarks respectively. The third part is the actual comparison in which I will first analyze the political and scientific context of the three careers before I turn to the structural and biographical factors.

General background

Studies of Scandinavia and the “North” - a multi faceted field

The academic study of the Scandinavian countries as well as a general interest for the North has a long tradition in Germany. Old Norse studies (Altnordistik) goes back to the early 19th century and the

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¹ Fritz Heinrich, 1997, ”Das religionswissenschaftliche Institut der Ernst Moritz Arndt-Universität Greifswald 1944-1945”, in: *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 5, p. 203-230, p. 215.

² Andreas Åkerlund, 2008, ”Åke Ohlmarks in the Third Reich. A Scientific Career between Adaptation, Cooperation and Ignorance”, in: Horst Junginger (ed.), *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism*, Leiden, p. 553-574.

beginnings of the German national project. One of the problems which intellectuals such as Johann Gottfried Herder or Jacob Grimm encountered in search of the German national character was the lack of sources for the pre-Christian German culture. This kind of sources, such as the Icelandic Eddas, was however present in Scandinavia. Herder and Grimm therefore included these sources in their work, considering them sources for the German history as well.³ The Scandinavian sources hence played a vital role at the creation of the German national identity and Old Norse Studies therefore had a place within the German prehistory (germanische Altertumskunde). As Julia Zernack has pointed out, this academic subject was not concerned with a real existing historical period. The main written sources, the Germania by Tacitus and the Icelandic Sagas, stems from two completely different historical times and geographical areas. Zernack therefore calls the study of the pre-Christian Germanic past a "historic-mythical reconstruction" (geschichtsmythische Rekonstruktion).⁴ During the 19th century the subject of Altnordistik was slowly detached from German philology and institutionalized at German universities, starting with the university in Kiel 1864. At the beginning of the 20th century the subject was represented at four universities; Kiel, Berlin, Leipzig and Heidelberg.⁵ Studies of Pre-Christian Scandinavia was however not limited to these four universities. Academics studying Old Norse themes can also be found within other subjects, such as German Philology and Archaeology. The Old Norse culture was also present in the cultural sphere through people like the editor Eugen Diederichs in Jena, who published popular translations of the Eddas and other Old Norse material in his series "Sammlung Thule".⁶ Additional to this academic interest in the Scandinavian prehistory an increased interest in modern Scandinavia can be registered in Germany as a whole around the turn from the 19th to the 20th century. The German emperor Wilhelm II travelled annually to Norway by boat, the number of German tourists to Scandinavia increased and Scandinavian authors such as Ibsen or Strindberg enjoyed an increased popularity.⁷ After World War I the institutionalization of Scandinavian studies, now mainly oriented towards contemporary literature and society, accelerated in Germany. In 1917 the Nordic Institute in Greifswald was founded as a part of the German governments' new interest in cultural foreign policy

³ See for instance Hermann Engster, 1986, *Germanisten und Germanen. Germanenideologie und Theoriebildung in der deutschen Germanistik und Nordistik von den Anfängen bis 1945 in exemplarischer Darstellung*, Frankfurt am Main, p. 12, Klaus von See, 1994, *Barbar, Germane, Arier. Die Suche nach der Identität der Deutschen*, Heidelberg, p. 77, Julia Zernack, 2001, "Germanische Altertumskunde, Skandinavistik und völkische Religiosität", in: Stefanie von Schnurbein & Justus H. Ulbricht (Hg.), *Völkische Religion und Krisen der Moderne*, München, p. 227-253, p. 228-229.

⁴ Zernack, 2001, p. 230.

⁵ Hans-Jürgen Hube, 1987, "Die Nordistik und das Berliner Germanische Seminar", in: *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Gesellschaftswissenschaftliche Reihe*, 36. Jg. Heft 9, p. 794-800. See also Rainer Kössling, 2003, "Anfänge der Nordistik an der Universität Leipzig", in: Wilhelm Heizmann & Astrid van Nahl (Hg.), *Runica - Germanica - Mediaevalia*, Berlin, p. 356-374, and Walther Heinrich Vogt, 1940, "Die Gründung der Deutschen und Nordischen Philologie an der Universität Kiel", in: Paul Ritterbusch, Hanns Löhr, Otto Scheel & Gottfried Ernst Hoffmann (Hg.), *Festschrift zum 275jährigen Bestehen der Christian-Albrechts-Universität Kiel*, Leipzig, p. 295-308.

⁶ For Diederichs see Julia Zernack, 1999, "Der 'Mythos vom Norden' und die Krise der Moderne. Skandinavische Literatur im Programm des Eugen Diederichs Verlages", in: Meike G. Werner & Justus H. Ulbricht (Hg.), *Romantik, Revolution und Reform. Der Eugen Diederichs Verlag im Epochenkontext 1900 bis 1945*, Göttingen, p. 208-223.

⁷ Daniela Büchten, 1997, "Opp mot Nord! Tyske turister i Skandinavia", in: Bernd Henningsen, Janine Klein, Helmut Müssener & Solfrid Söderlind (red.), *Skandinavien och Tyskland 1800-1914. Möten och vänskapsband*, Berlin, p. 113-114 and Zernack 2001, p. 236.

(auswärtige Kulturpolitik) and studies of foreign countries (Auslandswissenschaften).⁸ During the Republic of Weimar (1918-1933) the universities in Greifswald, Kiel and Berlin developed into centers for the study of Scandinavia. An increased amount of lecturers in Scandinavian languages, a rare position in the period prior to World War I, were also employed at German universities.⁹ At the National Socialist seizure of power in 1933 Scandinavian Studies was already established within the scientific world. The terminus “Nordische Studien” was however broad enough to include anything from Old Norse culture, over Scandinavian literature, history and law to geography.

The German academia and National Socialism

The National Socialist seizure of power in January 1933 was the start for a number of changes for the German scientific community. On April 7 1933 the “Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service” (German: “Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums”, short; BBG), was passed. This law forbade civil servants of “non-Aryan”-descent or who could be suspected of not supporting the national state due to earlier political activities. Around 15% of the German university professors were forced to retire from their chairs as a direct result of this law.¹⁰ They were in turn replaced by persons supporting or at least not opposing the regime. Further reforms included the dissolution of the elected university senates. Instead the universities were to be headed by the chancellor alone, responding only to the local authorities. Just like Germany as a whole, every university was to have its own Führer.¹¹ At the same time National Socialist party members were given high positions within the big organizations controlling research funds, such as the Kaiser Wilhelm-Gesellschaft (KWG) or the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). In short: the scientific world in National Socialist Germany was to be reorganized to support the new state. In a speech held for professors in Munich the Bavarian minister Hans Schemm expressed this in the following way: “From now on your task will not be to decide whether anything is true, but if it is according the National Socialist revolution.”¹²

There was however no instance capable of deciding if something was according the German revolution or not. The National Socialist state had no clear scientific program as different groups within the party and the state administration had different images of the new state about to be built. These groups had different goals and were in a constant conflict with each other. The internal power struggles within the National

⁸ Rainer Höll, 1997, *Die Nordeuropa-Institute der Universität Greifswald von 1918 bis 1945*, Greifswald, p. 4. For the German cultural foreign policy see Düwell, Kurt, 1971, “Staat und Wissenschaft in der Weimarer Epoche. Zur Kulturpolitik des Ministers C. H. Becker”, in: *HZ Beiheft N.F. 1*, p. 31-74 and Müller, Guido, 1991, *Weltpolitische Bildung und akademische Reform. C. H. Beckers Wissenschafts- und Hochschulpolitik 1908-1930*, Köln.

⁹ For the establishment of Swedish lecturers see Limberg, Lennart, 2008c, “Svenska lektoraten, åren 1913 till 1945”, in: Lennart Limberg (red.), *Internationell nationalism. Riksföreningen 100 år*, p. 87-139 and Karl Ahnlund & Andreas Åkerlund, 2009, “Svenskhetens bevarande som bildningsprojekt. Storsvenskheten, det svenska språket och nationell integration i utlandet under första halvan av 1900-talet”, in: Anne Berg & Hanna Enefalk (red.), *Det mångsidiga verktyget. Elva utbildningshistoriska uppsatser*, Uppsala, p. 137-153.

¹⁰ Peter Lundgreen, 1985, “Hochschulpolitik und Wissenschaft im Dritten Reich”, in: Peter Lundgreen (Hg.), *Wissenschaft im Dritten Reich*, Frankfurt am Main, s. 9-30. Lundgreen 1985, p. 12.

¹¹ This model was also called the Führer-principle (der Führer-Prinzip), see: Horst Möller, 1984, “Nationalsozialistische Wissenschaftsideologie”, in: Jörg Tröger (Hg.), *Hochschule und Wissenschaft im Dritten Reich*, Frankfurt am Main, p. 65-76, p. 73.

¹² Quoted in Möller 1984, p. 65.

Socialist movement affected the academics. Different actors supported scientific areas important for their ideological position. The changing political frames forced especially academics within the humanities to position themselves and, in many cases, to show a potential protector that their research was relevant within the ideological battles.¹³ Hence is to explain that even researchers trying to stay out of the political field sought alliances with representatives for different National Socialist organizations.¹⁴

It would be easy to see the National Socialist university politics; cleansing within the university personnel, a firmer state control over the universities and the sector of research and a stronger ideologization of scientific research, as an attack on science as such. There were however large sectors within the scientific field which grew remarkably during the national socialist dictatorship. Within the humanities one can point out the school of “Volksgeschichte” within the historical discipline.¹⁵ Some smaller discipline such as ethnology and science of religions also noted a strong growth of professorships and other personnel within the universities.¹⁶

Individual careers

Alexander Mutén and the Nordic studies in Rostock

Autumn 1932, only a few months before NSDAP commenced power in Germany Alexander Mutén was appointed lecturer in Swedish at the small university of Rostock. Mutén's background was typical for a language lecturer. He was born in 1903 and held a degree in Nordic languages, German and pedagogy from the college in Gothenburg.¹⁷ The University of Rostock had traditionally good contacts towards the Scandinavian countries, due to its position at the Baltic coast. During the Weimar Republic the university had not however been able to profit from the expansion of Nordic studies in Germany. The Nordic institute initiated by the Prussian state in 1917 had been placed at the neighboring university of Greifswald and a smaller Nordic Department had been founded within the German philology at the neighboring university of Kiel in 1922.

In Rostock the national socialist takeover was seen itself as a new possibility to establish Rostock as a university specializing in Scandinavia. In spring 1934 the philosophical faculty presented a program regarding the funding of an “Institute of Nordic Culture” to the local government of Mecklenburg. The institute was to consist of 7 departments. One department for Nordic law was to focus on law in the Nordic countries within the “total context of Germanic culture”. One department for the “Nordic

¹³ Georg Bollenbeck, 2001, “Das neue Interesse and der Wissenschaftshistoriographie und das Forschungsprojekt ‘semantischer Umbau der Geisteswissenschaften’”, in: Georg Bollenbeck & Clemens Knobloch (Hg.), *Semantischer Umbau der Geisteswissenschaften nach 1933 und 1945*, Heidelberg, p. 9-40, p. 15.

¹⁴ For different forms of collaboration, see Dieter Langewiesche, 1997, “Die Universität Tübingen in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus. Formen der Selbstgleichschaltung und Selbstbehauptung”, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 23, p. 618-646.

¹⁵ For Volksgeschichte see Ingo Haar, 2002, *Historiker im Nationalsozialismus. Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft und der “Volkstumskampf” im Osten*, Göttingen.

¹⁶ Horst Junginger, 2000, “Ethnologie und Religionswissenschaft, zwei nationalsozialistische Geisteswissenschaften?”, in: Bernhard Streck (Hg.), *Ethnologie und Nationalsozialismus*, Gehen, p. 51-66, p.56.

¹⁷ Michael Buddrus & Sigrid Fritzlar, 2007, *Die Professoren der Universität Rostock im Dritten Reich. Ein biographisches Lexikon*, München, p. 290-291

thought within the German philology”, focusing basically on the Old Norse language and research on German and Scandinavian dialects. Yet other departments were the departments of Nordic music, Nordic art and History of religions, which were to deal especially the Christianization of the German tribes. Departments of Nordic history and the “Nordic race” completed the institute.¹⁸ This attempt to establish a Nordic Institute is interesting as it shows how the academic and the ideological context fitted together. In the plans for the institute the university professors frequently referred to the political situation, and stated that it was their duty to establish contacts to Scandinavia. According the plans for the institute of music history for instance, a more intense exchange of music was one way to propagate the “Nordic thought”.¹⁹ The university also allied themselves with political interests and the plans included the voelkish-racist “Nordische Gesellschaft” (Nordic Society) as patron and protector of the institute.²⁰ The idea received support from high rank persons in the province of Mecklenburg. In April 1934 “Nordische Gesellschaft” presented a plan for the reorganization of the Nordic studies. According to this paper, the studies of Scandinavia in Germany lacked focus and had been far too scattered over the land. The society therefore suggested that the studies of the North were to be concentrated at the three north German universities of Kiel, Greifswald and Rostock, due to the geographic closeness of these universities. This proposal saw Rostock, being the only university without a Nordic institute receiving extra funds. The plan was backed up by Friedrich Hildebrandt, Gauleiter and Reichsstatthalter of Mecklenburg and therefore the highest representative of the NSDAP in the province.²¹

The institute in Rostock however received much criticism from leading politicians, such as the Gauleiter of Schleswig-Holstein Hinrich Lohse as well as from representatives of the universities in Kiel and Greifswald, who all concluded that more resources for Kiel and Greifswald would be far more effective than a new institute in Rostock.²² Facing this political and academic resistance the original plans were abandoned. This was a backlash for the university, but it was only the beginning of the attempts to make Rostock a university specialized in Scandinavia.

After the failed attempt in 1934 the attempts in Rostock started to involve the Swedish lectureship and the person Alexander Mutén. In autumn 1936 or spring 1937, an exact date is missing, Gaustudentenführer Fritz Schuchter, the local leader of the national socialist student union, handed in a proposal for the founding of a “Nordlandarbeitskreis”. This “Northern working group” was primarily a form of student

¹⁸ The detailed plans regarding the working area for every institute was handed in to the ministry and later merged into a memo. This memo as well as the detailed plans and correspondance regarding the institute are found in: Landeshauptarchiv Schwerin (LHAS), 5.12-7/1 Meckl.-Schwerinsches Min. f. Unterricht, Kunst... 1620.

¹⁹ Plan from 4 february 1934. LHAS, 5.12-7/1 Meckl.-Schwerinsches Min. f. Unterricht, Kunst... 1620.

²⁰ Undated plan for the organization of the institute, LHAS, 5.12-7/1 Meckl.-Schwerinsches Min. f. Unterricht, Kunst... 1620.

²¹ It was Hildebrandt who sent the plan to the local ministry (letter from Hildebrandt to Mecklenburgisches Kultusministerium 16 April 1934). The letter as well as a copy of the proposal from the Nordic Society is to be found in the University Archive Rostock (UAR), Phil.Fak. 190.

²² At the university of Kiel the reactions on the proposal from Rostock were immense and cannot be dealt with here. The commentaries are to be found in Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein (LASH), Abt. 47 CAU Kiel, 1847. See also letter from Gauleiter Schleswig-Holstein, Hinrich Lohse to Minister of education Bernhard Rust 30 June 1934, BA 4901 REM 933. For reactions from Greifswald see letter from Leopold Magon to Minister of education Bernhard Rust 14 July 1934, University Archive Greifswald (UAG), R 190.

exchange between the Scandinavian countries and Germany. The idea was to attract more Scandinavian students and to show them the “New Germany”.²³ The Swedish lecturer was given a crucial part in this proposal as he was to act as the main contact for students interested in the exchange, Swedish as well as German. According to the student leader Mutén was positive towards National Socialism, although he considered it to be something typically German.²⁴ We can not be sure whether this is true, as little is known about Mutén’s political preferences. It is however sure that foreign language lecturers who openly criticized national socialism was treated much like their German counterparts and banned from the country.²⁵

University and provincial government approved of the initiative and during the following years the lectureship of Mutén was given more resources. An example is that a foundation donated by Swedish interests in 1919 for a professorship in Swedish literature was put to his disposition during 1937. In 1938 Mutén presented a plan for the expansion of his lectureship, where he proposed that the university, instead of trying to establish a Nordic institute, should focus only on Sweden and the Swedish language. This way there would be less resistance from the already existing institutes in Kiel and Greifswald. In order to achieve this Mutén wanted to detach Swedish from German philology, making it an independent subject within the faculty. Changing the status within the university was however not enough; the provincial government would also have to act. In order to make the population more interested in Sweden Mutén proposed the establishment of Swedish as foreign language in the provincial schools and that the province should finance the exchange of schoolchildren, students and teachers between Mecklenburg and Sweden. To this came state support for public lecturers and Swedish national celebrations, such as the midsummer celebration.²⁶ Mutén himself had at this point already started to offer courses in Swedish to members of the national socialist recreation organization “Kraft durch Freude” as a way for them to prepare their holidays in Sweden.²⁷ In February 1939 the philosophical faculty applied for a “Lehrauftrag” (teaching assignment) in Swedish literature for Mutén, in addition to his lecturing.²⁸ This was a step up as it meant that he went from being only a language teacher to be more integrated in the faculty. Until this point the plans of the University of Rostock to profile itself as a university specialized in Scandinavia had benefited Alexander Mutén and had met no rejection from either state or party organizations.

This situation was to change. In January 1942 the university asked the ministry of education in Berlin to give the title of professor to Alexander Mutén. As reasons for the promotion the dean of the philosophical

²³ See the memos “Nordlandarbeitskreis” and “Planung und vorhandene Ansätze zur wissenschaftlichen Nordlandarbeit an der Universität Rostock”, UAR, Phil.Fak. 190.

²⁴ “Planung und vorhandene Ansätze zur wissenschaftlichen Nordlandarbeit an der Universität Rostock”, p. 2. UAR, Phil.Fak. 190.

²⁵ This was for instance the case with Stellan Arvidson, lecturer for Swedish at the University of Greifswald, who was forced away from the lectureship in 1933 after criticizing National Socialism in a Swedish Socialist magazine. See Brita Stenholm, 1998, “Stellan Arvidson und Greifswald”, in: *Germanisten. Zeitschrift schwedischer Germanisten* 3/1-3, p. 86-89.

²⁶ “Vorschlag zur Erweiterung des schwedischen Lektorats an der Universität Rostock”, UAR, Phil.Fak. 189.

²⁷ Letter from Mutén to K.A. Damgren (Swedish Embassy Berlin) 17 January 1938, Riksarkivet Stockholm (RA), UN, Vol. 17.

²⁸ Letter from dean Maybaum to Meckl. Staatsministerium, Abteilung Unterricht 18 february 1939, Bundesarchiv Berlin (Barch), ehem. BDC, Diverses, Mutén, Alexander, DS A0047.

faculty pointed out Mutén's importance for the contacts between the university and Sweden as well as his long time of duty within the German university system. At this time he had been at the university for ten years, far longer than any other Swedish lecturer in Germany. In short: in the application Mutén was described as a key person for the planned academic focus on Scandinavia and the plans on a Nordic Institute.²⁹ Although neither the NSDAP nor the GESTAPO had anything against Mutén's promotion and although he was backed up by the university as well as the local NSDAP student organization³⁰ the application was rejected. Heinrich Harmjanz at the ministry of education in Berlin motivated the rejection with the long employment time of Mutén, which exceeded the normal employment of four to five years for a language lecturer. He also had politically motivated doubts about making Mutén a civil servant as he did not think that a Swedish citizen could represent the German political interests in Scandinavian matters.³¹ Interestingly enough exactly the same arguments the university had used to promote Mutén were now turned against him.

The discussions between the ministries in Rostock and Berlin were to continue for the following years. In the end a compromise was made. On the 30th of August 1944 Mutén was appointed honorary professor at the University of Rostock.³² This way he was awarded the title professor, but he was not a civil servant. Mutén's time as a professor at the University of Rostock was to be short. At the end of 1944, as the Soviet army drew closer to the German borders, Mutén left the university and Germany.

Stig Wikander and the lectureship in Munich

In autumn 1938 the Swedish Iranist Stig Wikander came to Munich invited by the newly appointed professor of German Otto Höfler. Wikander was born in 1908 and had just received his doctorate from the University of Uppsala. This was also where he and Höfler got to know each other as the latter had been lecturer in German in Uppsala, before receiving a professorship in Kiel. They both also worked on similar topics. In 1934 Höfler had published *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen*, dealing with secret male societies among the pre-Christian Germanic peoples. According to historian of religions Stefan Arvidsson Wikander's dissertation *Der arische Männerbund* on secret male societies in old Iran, was an attempt to prove that the theories presented by Höfler were valid not only for the Germanics, but for all Aryans, hence for old Iran as well.³³ They also had similar political views. Wikander had been a member of various fascist organizations, amongst them the Swedish-German Society (Riksföreningen Sverige-Tyskland),

²⁹ Letter from dean to Staatsministerium, Abteilung Unterricht 19 January 1942, LHAS, 5.12-7/1 Meckl.-Schwerinsches Min. f. Unterricht, Kunst... 2548.

³⁰ For material concerning Mutén's promotion see LHAS, 5.12-7/1 Meckl.-Schwerinsches Min. f. Unterricht, Kunst... 2548 as well as BArch, ehem. BDC, Diverses, Mutén, Alexander, DS A0047.

³¹ Memo from Harmjanz from 12 June 1942, BArch, ehem. BDC, Diverses, Mutén, Alexander, DS A0047.

³² "Urkunde" from 30 August 1944, BArch, ehem. BDC, Diverses, Mutén, Alexander, DS A0047.

³³ See Bruce Lincoln, 1999, *Theorizing Myth. Narrative, Ideology and Scholarship*, Chicago, p. 126, Stefan Arvidsson, 2000, *Ariska Idoler. Den indoeuropeiska mytologin som vetenskap och ideologi*, Stockholm/Stehag, p. 230, Stefan Arvidsson, 2002, "Stig Wikander och forskningen om ariska mannaforbund", in: *Chaos. Dansk-norsk tidsskrift for religionshistoriske studier* 38, p. 55-68, p. 58-59 and Mihaela Timuş, 2008, "'Quand l'Allemagne était leur Mecque...'. La science des religions chez Stig Wikander (1935-1941)", in: Horst Junginger (ed.), *The Study of Religion under the Impact of National Socialist and Fascist Ideologies in Europe*, Leiden, p. 205-228.

whose outspoken aim was to bring about understanding for the “New Germany” in Sweden.³⁴ Höfler was Austrian from Vienna and had been active in right-wing organizations in the 1920s. After receiving a professorship in Kiel in 1935 he joined the NSDAP and worked as an advisor of the “Ahnenerbe”, the scientific organization of the SS.³⁵ It was Höfler's contacts with the Ahnenerbe that had led him to Munich. Dean of the philosophical faculty at the University of Munich after 1935 was Walther Wüst. Wüst had a professorship in “Aryan culture and language” and he was one of the leading persons within the SS Ahnenerbe, whose leader he became in 1937.³⁶ When Wüst was appointed dean in 1935 his main project became to reform the philosophical faculty, adapting it to National Socialism.³⁷ One part of this project was to strengthen the focus on German prehistory and folklore. In a letter to the Bavarian ministry for education written in December 1937 Wüst explained that the modern German philology was too concerned with language theory and too little with mythology and historical folklore. This was a contrast to the growing interest for pre-Christian German and Nordic history among the general public. The research within this area was, according to Wüst, carried out by dilettantes, which threatened to damage the reputation of German science abroad. Research on the old German culture was also crucial knowledge for the “new state”.³⁸ These plans were concretized as Wüst transformed a vacant chair in philosophy to German philology and recommended his fellow Ahnenerbe-colleague Otto Höfler to it.³⁹

SS and the Ahnenerbe were also active at the appointment of Höfler. Heinrich Himmler himself contacted the minister of education Bernhard Rust and supported his application, claiming that Höfler was needed in Munich for the “exploration of the Germanic heritage”.⁴⁰ True to the Nordic idea, Scandinavia was included in the “Germanic heritage” as seen by Wüst and Höfler. The university however lacked a lecturer in Swedish as the former lecturer, Herman Hansson, had ended his job in 1937 and the ministry of education in Berlin did not want to appoint a new one. The solution to this problem was to be Stig Wikander.

In October 1938 Wikander came to Munich too see Otto Höfler and Walter Wüst. Primarily he came because Höfler had told him, there was a possibility to publish his book *Der arische Männerbund* through the SS-Ahnenerbe publishing house.⁴¹ He had also received a promise to use Walther Wüst's collections for

³⁴ Lincoln 1999, p. 126, Arvidsson 2002, p. 58 and p. 61-63.

³⁵ For Höfler see Harm-Peer Zimmermann, 1995, “Vom Schlaf der Vernunft. Deutsche Volkskunde an der Kieler Universität 1933 bis 1945”, in: Hans-Werner Prahl (Hg.), *Uni-Formierung des Geistes. Universität Kiel im Nationalsozialismus. Band 1*, Kiel, p. 171-274, pp. 201 and Gajek, Esther, 1997, “Germanenkunde und Nationalsozialismus. Zur Verflechtung von Wissenschaft und Politik am Beispiel Otto Höfler”, in: Richard Faber (Hg.), *Politische Religion – Religiöse Politik*, Würzburg, p. 173-204.

³⁶ For Wüst see Horst Junginger, 2008, “From Buddha to Adolf Hitler. Walther Wüst and the Aryan Tradition”, in: Horst Junginger (ed.), *The Study of Religion under the Impact of National Socialist and Fascist Ideologies in Europe*, Leiden, p. 107-177 and Maximilian Schreiber, 2008, *Walther Wüst. Dekan und Rektor der Universität München 1935-1945*, München. For Ahnenerbe see Michael H. Kater, 2006 [1974], *Das “Ahnenerbe“ der SS 1935-1945. Ein Beitrag zur Kulturpolitik des Dritten Reiches*, München.

³⁷ Schreiber 2008, p. 73-78.

³⁸ Letter to Bayer. Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus from Wüst 28 December 1937, Bayrisches Hauptstaatsarchiv München (BayHStA), MK 69694. See also Schreiber s. 122-123 and Zernack s. 52.

³⁹ Schreiber 2008, p. 121-122.

⁴⁰ Schreiber 2008, p. 123.

⁴¹ Letter to Wikander from Höfler 20 June 1938, Uppsala University Library (UUB), Stig Wikanders collection, letters H-K. Otto Höfler.

this new, revised version.⁴² Wikanders presence in Munich was convenient for Höfler and Wüst. He was a young Swedish scholar who shared their political views as well as their scientific interests and fitted well in their plans to establish studies of the Germanic heritage in Munich. In December 1938 Wüst applied for at “Lehrauftrag” (teaching assignment) for Wikander.⁴³ The application was followed by a letter from Höfler stating that courses in Swedish were crucial for his own teaching. He also pointed out Wikanders nationalism and his sympathy for the National Socialist state.⁴⁴ Wikander himself was very optimistic towards the collaboration with Wüst and Höfler, as can be seen in his letter to his parents.⁴⁵ Wikanders optimism was however not only related to his work in Munich as letters to his father, written in 1939, show that he did not see a future in the Swedish academia.⁴⁶ In Munich on the other hand, Wüst and Höfler continued to help his scientific career. Wüst offered him to publish in the journals controlled by Ahnenerbe and to write articles related to Iran in a planned encyclopedia called “Reallexikon der Indogermanischen Mythologie”.⁴⁷ They also supported Wikander in his attempts to become a permanent lectureship as did the Munich branch of the Nordic Society (Nordische Gesellschaft) who described Wikander as the “Führer” of the nationalistic Swedish youth.⁴⁸

Wikanders short career in Munich came to an end in September 1939. The reason for this was money. In 1939 the Bavarian ministry of education decided to withdraw all funds from the Swedish lectureship, much against the will of Wüst and Höfler. Facing the alternatives of continuing his work in Munich on a badly paid teaching assignment or return to Sweden, Wikander choose the latter.

Åke Ohlmarks and the Institute for Comparative Religion in Greifswald

In 1941 Åke Ohlmarks was employed as a lecturer in Swedish at the University of Greifswald. Ohlmarks was born in 1911 and received his doctorate from the University of Lund in 1937, being the youngest doctor of philosophy in Sweden at the time. He was a scholar of Nordic philology, specializing in Old Norse religion, but failed to start an academic career in Sweden after receiving the doctorate. The main reasons for this failure were personal conflicts with other scholars at his home university of Lund, a conflict which ran so deep that one of the leading Swedish historians at the time, Lauritz Weibull, pleaded for the disallowance of Ohlmarks thesis. Additionally his scientific work was not well received within the Swedish scientific community at the time, and Ohlmarks’ theories on the origins of the Old Norse religion

⁴² letter to his father from Wikander 14 Oktober 1938, UUB, Stig Wikanders collection, NC: 1468, Letters to the parents 1938 MT 6.

⁴³ Letter to Bayer. Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus from Wüst, 2 December 1938, University Archive München (UAM), Y-XVII-45 vol. 2.

⁴⁴ Letter from Otto Höfler 19 November 1938, UAM, Y-XVII-45 vol. 2.

⁴⁵ See for instance a letter to his father from Stig Wikander 7 December 1938 in which Wikander states that he will stay in Germany if his position should become permanent, UUB, Stig Wikanders collection, NC: 1468, Letters to the parents 1938 MT 6.

⁴⁶ Letter to his father from Wikander 20 February 1939 and 24 March 1939, UUB, Stig Wikanders collection, NC: 1468, Letters to the parents 1939 MT 7.

⁴⁷ Letter to his father from Wikander 8 June 1939, UUB, Stig Wikanders collection, NC: 1468, Letters to the parents 1939 MT 7.

⁴⁸ Letter to Bayer. Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus from NG München 21 August 1939, UAM, Y-XVII-45 vol. 2.

was regarded far fetched and full of fantasies.⁴⁹ All this together made it hard for him to continue working within Swedish academia.

Ohlmarks political views were conservative with a notable anti-communist and anti-Russian edge. He was however never politically active and not member of any political organization or party. There are no signs of him being an anti-Semite which did not stop him from side with Swedish anti-Semite theologian Hugo Odeberg in 1939. Through him Ohlmarks established academic contacts with the German Christian movement. This branch within the German protestant church stated that Jesus had been an Aryan, and that early Christianity had deranged through contact with the Jewish culture. The German Christians therefore headed a research institute in Eisenach with the aim to take away all “Jewish impact” from Christianity.⁵⁰ As the position as lecturer in the Swedish language at the University of Greifswald got vacant in 1941, Ohlmarks application was supported by the German Christian theologians Gerhard Kittel and Wolf Meyer-Erlach. In his letter of recommendation, Meyer-Erlach certified that Ohlmarks was a part of the “National Front in Sweden” and that he “actively worked for the cooperation between the two Germanic nations as a member of the ‘Swedish-German Society’.”⁵¹ This was an exaggeration as Ohlmarks himself was neither an active Christian nor does his academic writing bear any traces of anti-Semitism. Instead it seems that Ohlmarks sided with Odeberg and the German Christians for the only reason that they could help him to get an academic position. The German Christians on their hand had ideological reasons for supporting Ohlmarks. One must bear in mind that this was an organization trying to bring about an “Aryan” or “Nordic” Christianity. What was lacking them was knowledge on Old Norse culture, which Ohlmarks could provide. This assumption is supported by the fact that Ohlmarks belonged to a research group on Old Norse religion called “Odal” founded by Odeberg.

In Germany Ohlmarks continued collaborating with the German Christians, participating in their scientific meetings and giving lectures. According to the work report recorded for 1941-1942, he gave a lecture on the Icelandic sagas 18 times and a lecture on the Old Norse God Ullr and the origin of the sacral kingdom of the Germanic peoples no less than 36 times.⁵² For Ohlmarks however it seems to have been more important to establish himself at the University of Greifswald. He managed to do this and 1944 an Institute for Comparative Religion, headed by Ohlmarks, was opened at the university. As Fritz Heinrich has shown, this institute was made possible by the church politics of the Third Reich. In order to

⁴⁹ For Ohlmarks, the failed defence of his thesis and the conflicts about his work see Andreas Åkerlund, 2006, “Åke Ohlmarks and the ‘Problem’ of Shamanism”, in: *Archaeus. Études d’Histoire des Religions/Studies in the History of Religions, Tome X, fasc. 1-2*, p. 201-220 and Åkerlund 2008.

⁵⁰ This institute was called “Institut zur Erforschung und Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben“ (Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life). See Susannah Heschel, “Deutsche Theologen für Hitler”, in Peter von der Osten-Sacken, ed. *Das mißbrauchte Evangelium. Studien zur Theologie und Praxis der Thüringer Deutschen Christen* (Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 2002), pp. 70-90. For the contacts between Swedish theology and the institute see Anders Gerdmar, 2006, “Ein germanischer Jesus auf schwedischem Boden. Schwedisch-deutsche Forschungszusammenarbeit mit rassistischen Vorzeichen 1941-1945”, in: Roland Deines, Volker Leppin & Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr (Hg.), *Walter Grundmann. Ein Neutestamentler in Dritten Reich*, Leipzig, p. 319-348.

⁵¹ The letters of recommendation from Kittel and Meyer-Erlach are found in UAG, PA 2695. See also: Anders Marell, 1998, “Åke Ohlmarks – schwedischer Lektor, Nazimitläufer und/oder Geheimagent?,” in: *Germanisten. Zeitschrift schwedischer Germanisten* 3/1-3, pp. 93-100, here p. 96.

⁵² Landeskirchenarchiv Eisenach (LKE), A 921, fol. 70.

weaken the faculties of Theology Martin Bormann suggested moving Greifswald's theological faculty to Kiel.⁵³ The systematic theologian Wilhelm Koepp tried to avoid this measure by widening the theological program to include comparative religion. Koepp was also a member of the German Christians and he and Ohlmarks obviously saw mutual benefits in broadening the work of the theological faculty. For Ohlmarks it was a possibility to get established within the scientific world, whereas for Koepp the inclusion of Ohlmarks, being a non-theologian and covering the ideologically important field of Old Norse religion would help him in his plans to keep theology in Greifswald. In spring 1944 Koepp therefore helped Ohlmarks becoming a lecturer in general history of religions with a special reference to the religion of the primitives at the theological faculty.⁵⁴ On November 22, 1944 the Institute of comparative Religion was opened at the University of Greifswald in the presence of the minister of education, Bernhard Rust. Ohlmarks' time as head of the institute was however to be short. As the Soviet army drew nearer on the city in the spring of 1945, Ohlmarks left Germany for Sweden.

Conclusions

Adaptation and ideological conflicts as career opportunities

At a first look the three careers described above seem very different. Wikander's time in Germany was roughly two years and short in comparison with Alexander Mutén's. Wikander left Germany before the war started whereas Ohlmarks arrived in 1941. Mutén was a historian of literature, Wikander an Iranist and Ohlmarks a historian of religion. One could say that the only two things they had in common was that they all were employed as lecturers in the Swedish language and that the careers all ended abruptly due to either lack of money or the Second World War.

All three cases do however show something fundamental of the academic world in national socialist Germany. After the politically motivated cleansings a lot of actors within the universities sought to adapt to the new ideology. The University of Rostock argued for a specialization in Scandinavia with the importance for National Socialist politics. Wüsts work for a National Socialist faculty in Munich can be seen as a way to establish SS-Ahnenerbe within the university. The German Christians wanted to aryanize Christianity and adapt it to a "Blut und Boden"-ideology. This new theological interest in Old Germanic and Old Norse religion could also help keeping theology at the universities, which the case with Wilhelm Koepp and theology in Greifswald shows. Here we see how National Socialist rise to power changed the conditions for the scientific world, and how all the initiatives mentioned above were attempts to adapt to these new frames.

Something that fitted into the new frames was obviously Scandinavia and the "North". The field of "Nordic Studies" can therefore be counted to the beneficiaries of the National Socialist state alongside science of religions or ethnology. The case of Alexander Mutén and his career at the University of Rostock is a good example of this. Here philosophical faculty used the tradition of close contacts between

⁵³ Heinrich 1997, pp. 225-228.

⁵⁴ Fritz Heinrich, 2002, *Die deutsche Religionswissenschaft und der Nationalsozialismus. Eine ideologiekritische und wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Petersberg, p. 227f.

Scandinavia and the university within the new political context in order to establish the institute for Nordic studies. The arguments that the institute would propagate the “Nordic Thought” in Scandinavia gave it support from party functionaries and the Nordic Society. As the big plan failed the solution was to build in a smaller scale, hence the interest in Alexander Mutén and his lectureship. That Mutén benefited from this new interest in Scandinavia is unquestionable. He could keep his lectureship for thirteen years, an extremely long time compared to other lecturers who normally stayed between two and four years. He was given an extra teaching assignment, again something very unusual. Last but not least he was the first Swedish lecturer in Germany ever for whom the university applied for a professorship.

Looking at Ohlmarks and Wikander they too benefited from the interest in Scandinavia. Their cases are however more closely related to the role of Scandinavia within the national socialist ideology. One side of the German interest for Scandinavia and especially Old Norse culture described above was the idea of a “Nordic race” represented by persons like Hans F. K. Günther, who popularized the term in the 1920s. The basic idea of the superiority of this Nordic race can be described as follows. People from northern Europe had through history been emigrating in “waves”, founding basically all higher cultures on earth. Even though the term “Nordic Race” was first used by Günther in 1922, the image of the people inhabiting the northernmost part of Europe as superior can be traced back to the 17th century.⁵⁵ The notion of a Nordic community, including Scandinavians and Germans alike, was propagated by a variety of groups in pre-war Germany, most famous the Nordic Society (Nordische Gesellschaft). This was basically the same idea of Germanic cultural unity that had been vivid in Germany since the 19th century, but with a racial biological fundament. From here stems the notion of a close affinity between the German and Scandinavian peoples (Volksverwandtschaft) which was often held high by National Socialist functionaries.

After the National socialist takeover however the question of the Nordic race and its history was to be subject for a fierce ideological battle between various NS-organizations, such as the Nordic Society, and the SS-Ahnenerbe. As scholars sympathetic to these organizations made the question theirs, this ideological conflict was carried into the scientific world, and transformed into an academic conflict. Walther Wüst and Otto Höfler were for instance having a harsh conflict about the true spirit of the religion of Germanic race with Bernhard Kummer at the University of Jena at the time they decided to tie Wikander to the University of Munich.⁵⁶ Just like Wüst and Höfler were backed up by the party organization SS Ahnenerbe, Kummer received support from Alfred Rosenberg and his alternate university organization “Hohe Schule”. Due to the obvious ties between party politics and academia even the contemporaries saw this conflict not only as an academic discussion, but as a part of a larger conflict about the official ideology of the national Socialist state. The attempts of the German Christians to “aryanize” Christianity can

⁵⁵ See for instance Hans-Jürgen Lützhöft, *Der nordische Gedanke in Deutschland 1920-1940*, Stuttgart, p. 114 pp. or Birgitta Almgren, Jan Hecker-Stampehl & Ernst Piper, 2008, “Alfred Rosenberg und die Nordische Gesellschaft. Der ‘nordische Gedanke’ in Theorie und Praxis”, in: *Nordeuropafourm 2/2008*, p. 7-51, p. 10-11.

⁵⁶ For this conflict see Fritz Heinrich, 2008, “Bernhard Kummer (1897-1962). The Study of Religions Between Religious Devotion for the Ancient Germans, Political Agitation and Academic Habitus”, in: Horst Junginger (red.), *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism*, Leiden, p. 229-262, here p. 254-258.

actually be seen as a part of the conflict over the official ideology as well. It was a way to confront the more pagan thoughts of persons like Kummer, for whom the decline of the Germanic race had begun with the Christianization. An Aryan Christianity would be more compatible with National Socialist racial ideology, but would still conserve the Christian heritage.

There is no point in describing the ideological battles of the Third Reich any further. More important is to point to their importance for the careers of Wikander and Ohlmarks. It is arguably so that the planned expansion of Germanic studies at the University of Munich was the reason for Wüst and Höfler to get Wikander a position as lecturer and to support him in other ways. The same thing can be said about the support that Ohlmarks received from the German Christians for his application to Greifswald. The idea to move theology away from Greifswald which finally made the institute for comparative religion possible was also a part of the ideological conflicts between different Christian and non-Christian fractions within the NSDAP. For Wikander as well as Ohlmarks the ideological conflicts of the Third Reich opened the possibilities to establish themselves at German universities.

Individual biographies and academic traditions

The careers of Mutén, Wikander and Ohlmarks also show that you did not have to be an active national socialist to benefit from the changes within the German university system after 1933. True is that none of them was a direct enemy of the National Socialist state or ideology, but only Wikander had been an active member of fascist organizations in Sweden. Political sympathies for “the new Germany” can therefore not be the only reason for these scholars to try and establish themselves at German universities. The political changes and internal conflicts within the NSDAP might have created the career possibilities described above, but this is not enough if one is to explain why persons like Mutén or Ohlmarks also chose to use them.

In order to understand the interest in a position at a German university during National Socialist rule one has to consider the previous historical epochs. For many parts of Swedish academia, Germany was the country with whom one had the closest, most intensive academic contacts. This is true especially for the humanities. Knowledge of German and German research and contact with German scientist were arguable more common in Sweden in the 1930s than it is today. The position as lecturer in the Swedish language in turn had a special position within the scientific exchange of the two countries. Lecturers in Swedish had existed at German universities before 1933 and were an established way for German universities to get in touch with and maintain the contacts to the Swedish academic world. Historically the lecturer had often been a scientist working on topics close to those of the head of the institute. For a young Swedish scientist interested in German language, literature or only looking to establish contacts in German academia, a lectureship was a good position. The function of lectureships within the academic career system was therefore comparable to a doctoral or post doctoral scholarship and had of course been so prior to the National Socialist takeover.

Age is a factor in this context. Born 1903, 1908 and 1911 respectively Mutén, Wikander and Ohlmarks were all in their early thirties when they moved to Germany. They were yet not old enough to hold a good

position at a Swedish university and scholarships were rare. All three of them however saw their future within the university. Mutén was working at his doctoral thesis during his time as lecturer in Rostock, whereas Wikander and Ohlmarks both had finished their dissertations. For all three of them the lectureship therefore presented itself as a possibility to keep on working within the academic field after graduation. This was especially the case with Åke Ohlmarks due to the problems he had experienced in Sweden, but we know that Stig Wikander as well was very pessimistic about his chances to ever get a post doctoral scholarship in Sweden.⁵⁷

We see how many different factors combined made a scientific career in National Socialist Germany attractive for Swedish scholars. First of all there is the historical background. The general knowledge of German language and scientific culture was common in Sweden and German science was widely respected in Sweden. The closeness between the scientific cultures is best illustrated by the fact that Ohlmarks as well as Wikander both wrote their thesis in German.⁵⁸ The interest was mutual. The establishment of lectureships in Swedish also shows the German interest in Scandinavia. These lectureships moreover provided a possibility for Swedish scholars to work at German universities and to establish contacts with German academia. The National Socialist seizure of power did not change this relationship in any way, except that the new rules made it impossible for academics with certain political views to work at the country's universities. In accepting a lectureship, Mutén, Wikander and Ohlmarks only did what a lot of Swedish academics had done before them. The difficulties experienced in Sweden definitely helped in this decision. Once in Germany other possibilities opened up. These were in turn closely connected to the internal ideological battles of the NSDAP and the National Socialist state. The important role that Scandinavia and the North played within the National Socialist ideology and propaganda made scholars like the ones treated in this paper interesting for organizations trying to achieve a more "Nordic" profile. What could be better for a university like the University of Rostock trying to establish itself as a university specializing in Scandinavia, than to have a Swede as leading figure? If you, like Wüst and Höfler, wanted to include Scandinavia in the mapping of the "Germanic heritage", you obviously should work with a Scandinavian scholar. And last but not least: Making Christianity more "Aryan", "Germanic" or "Nordic", calls for knowledge in Old Germanic or Norse mythology.

In short: The possibilities opening up for Swedish scholars in Nazi Germany were actually a combination of two factors. First there was the older tradition of Nordic studies, which provided the structural framework of lectureships in Swedish as well as a concept of Nordic studies being that anything related to Scandinavia would fall within its frames. Secondly there was the internal adaptation to National Socialism as well as the ideological conflicts taking place within the academic field. The here investigated Swedish scholars interested in establishing themselves within this academic field had two things in common. First of all they came from a scientific context where German science and culture was seen as an important, if

⁵⁷ Letter to his father from Wikander 20 February 1939, UUB, Stig Wikanders collection, NC: 1468, Letters to the parents 1939 MT 7.

⁵⁸ Åke Ohlmarks, 1937, *Heimdalls Horn und Odins Auge. Studien zur nordischen und vergleichenden Religionsgeschichte, Erstes Buch (I-II) Heimdallr und das Horn*, Lund and Stig Wikander, 1938, *Der arische Männerbund. Studien zur indo-iranischen Sprach- und Religionsgeschichte*, Lund.

not the most important, influence and secondly they were relatively young and therefore not established within the Swedish scientific context. This combination, a weak position within Swedish science combined with a German oriented academic interest, made an academic career in Germany, National Socialist or not, attractive for Swedish scholars like Mutén, Ohlmarks or Wikander.