

Minoo Mirshahvalad

How Julius Evola Shaped Italian Traditionalists' Understanding of Shi'ism

Julius Evola exerted a significant influence on the ideas of certain Italian Traditionalists who later converted to Shi'ism. In his writings of the 1930s and 1950s, Evola developed a flawed understanding of Islam, particularly of Shi'a traditions. He portrayed Ismailism - the more esoteric branch of Shi'ism, with which Italy was historically familiar through Marco Polo's accounts and Sicily's Islamic past - as the primary form of Shi'ism, while relegating Twelver Shi'ism - the largest and more juridically oriented branch - to a secondary position. In doing so, Evola effectively inverted the relationship between the two branches of Shiism. This interpretation, reinforced by Henry Corbin's romanticized approach to Shi'ism - also marked by a strong fascination with Ismailism - convinced Italian Traditionalists that Shi'ism was fundamentally an esoteric religion. In the 1970s, the political success of Ayatollah Khomeini further encouraged many Italian Traditionalists to embrace Shi'ism, which they perceived as simultaneously esoteric and revolutionary. They interpreted it as the religion of the medieval mystic-warrior celebrated by Evola in *Revolt Against the Modern World*. Such a romanticized understanding led converts to attribute to Twelver Shi'ism characteristics that during Middle ages had largely been relegated to the realm of heterodoxy or heresy by Shia jurists. Indeed, the success of Ayatollah Khomeini represents a modern outcome of the centuries long doctrinal developments. Drawing on digital and print publications by Italian Traditionalists, this paper analyzes how Evola's ideas became intertwined with those of Henry Corbin, producing an anti-modern appraisal of a profoundly modern revolution: the Iranian Revolution.

Minoo Mirshahvalad is a sociologist and anthropologist of Islam. Her research examines the intersections of religion, migration, and gender in contemporary Europe. She obtained her PhD in Sociology from the University of Turin in 2020 and is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Copenhagen. Her main publications—including monographs, peer-reviewed journal articles, and book chapters - focus on religious conversion and Shi'a communities in Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Denmark. In addition to conversion studies, her research

interests include digital media practices among Muslim communities and the dynamics of Islamic religious authority in European contexts.

Julian Strube

“The Esoteric Far Right: From Völkisch Milieus to Global Politics”

The relationship between esotericism and far-right politics has never been marginal, even if it has often been either neglected in sober analysis or sensationalized in public debate. From the nineteenth century onward, it took shape within prominent debates about “true religion,” modern society, science, and the relationship between so-called Western, especially Christian, and Eastern religions. This contribution will show that these debates emerged in contexts shaped by Orientalism, colonialism, and the contested place of religion in modernity, developed with particular force in völkisch milieus, and contributed to far-right esoteric currents that flourished in the interwar period. Since 1945, such currents have played a significant role in the global political landscape. Often coded through symbols such as the Black Sun in more extremist contexts, they have more recently gained visibility at the highest political levels, not least through new-right metapolitics and the reception of Evolian Traditionalism. The central argument is that esotericism must be understood as part of a wider global religious-political constellation that includes Christian nationalism, Hindu nationalism, neopaganism, and Islamist currents. The paper examines key historical developments and analytical perspectives, while also surveying earlier approaches adopted by religious and state institutions, political education, and the academic study of esotericism. In doing so, it seeks to develop a more critical, nuanced, and differentiated account of the dynamics between esotericism, religion, and politics.

Peter Staudenmaier

“Evola’s Traditionalism: Anti-Modernism as a Modern Construct”

Julius Evola was both one of the foremost esoteric figures in twentieth century Italy and one of the most influential thinkers of the far right. Since his death half a century ago, Evola (1898-1974) has become an iconic figure for successive generations of the

Abstracts Panel: Anti-Modernism

radical right around the world while also gaining a substantial following among adherents of alternative spirituality. At the heart of his philosophy stood a version of Traditionalism that Evola developed from the 1920s onward in dialogue with René Guénon and others. Profoundly shaped by the Fascist era in which it took root, Evola's Traditionalism emphasized a spiritual critique of modernity and its soulless materialism. These ideas took particularly sharp form in Evola's 1934 magnum opus *Revolt Against the Modern World*, a book that remains popular among far right militants and New Age enthusiasts alike. In this and many other works, Evola presented a complex series of esoteric and neo-pagan motifs as well as elements borrowed from Hinduism and Buddhism, among other sources. He adopted a variant of the Aryan myth from Theosophy to refine the racial theories that formed a crucial part of his writings in the 1930s and 1940s. A strongly conspiracist variety of antisemitism gave special impetus to his anti-modern arguments. Though Evola insisted that the tenets of his Traditionalist worldview derived from ancient origins and embodied timeless truths, they were in reality a remarkably modern construct assembled from ideological elements specific to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Careful examination of the historical contexts and contents of Evola's Traditionalism can shed light on the nexus between alternative spiritualities and far right politics within the broader currents of modernism, anti-modernism, and fascism.

Moritz Maurer

"From Hyperborea to Tartaria: Right-Wing Utopias, Internet Culture, and the History of Esotericism"

This paper examines Hyperborea, Tartaria, and similar constructs as right-wing imagines spaces transmitted through internet culture. Drawing on recent work on right-wing esotericism, conspiratoriality, and digital culture, it argues that such narratives are not merely symbolic motifs or conspiratorial curiosities, but phantastic counter-sites in which anti-modern desires, alternative historiographies, and spiritualized notions of origin are condensed and circulated. What is being explored here are counter-narratives to a present perceived as decadent and materialistic – and alternative conceptions of history that, in their own right, constitute a critique of

Abstracts Panel: Anti-Modernism

hegemonic discourses on various levels. These formations can only be understood in relation both to the history of esotericism and to the specific communicative conditions of social media. Historically, constructs of this kind recall older esoteric discourses on lost civilizations and hidden prehistories, including Atlantis, Lemuria, and forms of alternative archaeology. At the same time, their contemporary significance emerges through digital practices of remixing, reframing, and memetic circulation. What emerges in this way are ironically refracted, often post-ironic constellations of meaning in which esoteric topoi, conspiratorial modes of interpretation, and far-right political imaginaries are articulated through the participatory and affective logics of internet culture.