

MARTIN M. WINKLER

# ARMINIUS THE LIBERATOR

MYTH AND IDEOLOGY



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Summary: Arminius the Liberator deals with the complex modern reception of Arminius the Cheruscan, commonly called Hermann. Arminius inflicted one of their most devastating defeats on the Romans in the year 9 A.D. by annihilating three legions under the command of Quintilius Varus in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, as it is generally if inaccurately called. This book traces the origin of the Arminius myth in antiquity and its political, artistic, and popular developments since the nineteenth century. The book's central themes are the nationalist use and abuse of history and historical myth in Germany, especially during the Weimar Republic and National Socialism, the reactions to a discredited ideology involving Arminius in post-war Europe, and revivals of his myth in the United States. Special emphasis is on the representation of Arminius in visual media since the 1960s: from painting and theater to cinema, television, and computer animation.

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## ADAGES

*Ein Kritiker hat einmal die launige Bemerkung gemacht, die Varusschlacht sei für die deutschen Gelehrten ein weit größeres Unglück geworden als für die Römer*

A critic once drolly remarked that the Battle of Varus turned out to be a far greater calamity for German scholars than for the Romans

—Alwin Lonke, 1946

*Von der Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald machen wir uns falsche Vorstellungen; schuld daran ist die Romantik unserer Geschichtsprofessoren*

We have the wrong idea about the Battle in the Teutoburg Forest; the blame lies with the romanticism of our history professors

—Adolf Hitler, 1941

*Der Patriotismus ruiniert die Geschichte*

Patriotism spoils history

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1817

Ideas and myths are potent forces in history

—Hugh Trevor-Roper, 1980

*Le Temps de l'Image est venu!*

The Time of the Image has come!

—Abel Gance, 1927

*Die Geschichte soll ja als Mythos zu uns sprechen. Auch im Film*

After all, history should speak to us as myth. In the cinema, too

—Paul Gerhardt Dippel, 1943

In the end, he who screens the history makes the history

—Gore Vidal, 1992

## PREFACE

The present book is intended to make a specific contribution to the wide-ranging political, cultural, and intellectual history of Arminius, the Cheruscan chieftain who defeated the Roman army commander Varus and his legions in 9 AD. The book is also meant to demonstrate the processes of historical mythmaking, primarily in the age of visual and related mass media. It is therefore a study of one particular, if complex, aspect of the uses and abuses of history in the modern age, especially in regard to nationalist ideologies. Naturally, such a topic has numerous ramifications. For this reason I present a variety of interpretations rather than one strict line of interpretation. I do not attempt to address the totality of mythmaking about Arminius. No one volume and probably no one author could do this, as any familiarity with the extensive scholarship about Arminius makes immediately clear. Enough of this scholarship is referred to in my notes and listed in my bibliography to provide readers who wish to follow up on certain aspects of my subject with ready means further to pursue their interests or their own studies.

In view of my discussion of various historical, cultural, and political ideologies, it is worth remembering one obvious but fundamental aspect of all history: that it can easily be turned into myth and that historical myth is subservient, sometimes willingly, sometimes forcibly, to political ideology. An eminent British historian has expressed the matter in words of deceptively simple dignity. "Ideas and myths are potent forces in history," Hugh Trevor-Roper, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford University, said in his Valedictory Lecture in 1980.<sup>1</sup> My book is equally a result and an illustration of the power of historical myth and its images over modern life. The history of Arminius began to be turned into myth during his lifetime and has been

<sup>1</sup> Trevor-Roper, "History and Imagination," 365.

overshadowed by ideological uses and abuses ever since. With the advent of visual mass media, this process has only intensified. My purpose therefore is to examine, on the one hand, the connections between and among history, myth, and political ideology and, on the other, a variety of the reactions to ideology in the visual-media age, especially in regard to moving images. An awareness of the precursors of such images, both in antiquity and in premodern and early modern times, is, however, indispensable.

Part I of my book therefore begins with an assessment of ancient Roman historiography concerning Arminius and of modern German scholarship on the ancient sources. The purpose of Chapter 1 is to demonstrate how inextricably history and mythmaking—fact, fiction, and ideology—are linked to each other. Chapter 2 is an overview of nationalist-historical mythmaking about Arminius in Germany, a process that began in the sixteenth century and reached its climax in the twentieth. A crucial new turn, that of ardent nationalism brought on by the defeat of Germany in World War I and leading to National Socialism, is examined in Chapter 3. Part II, comprising Chapters 4 and 5, then demonstrates the development from 1920s nationalism to 1930s National Socialism in connection with the cinema, the most powerful means of political manipulation, at least until recently.

Chapter 4 deals with *Die Hermannschlacht*, a little-known but crucial 1924 film about the Battle in the Teutoburg Forest. A brief consideration of the spelling of this film's title is appropriate here. The customary German term *Hermannsschlacht* ("Hermann's Battle") derives from *Hermanns Schlacht* and uses the letter *s* twice. But in this particular case there is only one *s*. (It would be idle to speculate about a reason.) This spelling is rather unusual but does not affect the term's meaning. As a result, there are two spellings of the word to be found in this book.

Chapter 5 turns to a brief but telling example of how the Nazi film *Ewiger Wald* could incorporate the Battle into its propaganda. No modern historian of Rome or of the reception of the Roman Empire appears to be familiar with either film. Chapters 3 to 5 are not meant to indicate, and should not be taken as indicating, that I consider German nationalism and National Socialism as nearly identical. I only wish to demonstrate their affinities. As the name says, National Socialism is a *national* ideology, even though it represents a significantly more intense, narrow-minded, and fanatical worldview. As such, it cannot be separated from preceding forms of German nationalism. Here is just one small example to illustrate what I mean. In 1862 German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, whom we will encounter again, coined the phrase *Blut und Eisen* ("blood and iron") concerning the desired unification of the then-independent German territories. This unification came about in 1871 as the result of the Franco-Prussian War. Then, in 1875, the *Hermannsdenkmal* ("Hermann's Monument"), Arminius' gigantic statue near the city of Detmold, was dedicated. Hermann has been Arminius'

common German name at least since the time of Martin Luther (cf. Chapter 2). A modern historian has summarized the common opinion about Arminius held by the German press around 1875 in these terms:

Arminius wird als “Staatsmann” modelliert, der seine Politik auf “Blut und Eisen” gründete, um endlich den gemeinsamen Widerstand gegen Rom zu organisieren.

Arminius was the model of a “statesman,” who based his policies on “blood and iron” in order finally to organize the common resistance to Rome.<sup>2</sup>

The expression *Blut und Eisen* may today remind us of the well-known Nazi slogan *Blut und Boden* (“blood and soil”). Although we should be wary of relying too much on historical hindsight, the Nazi use of Arminius justifies a consideration of nationalism and National Socialism in tandem.

Part III is the book’s longest because its task is to demonstrate that the complexities inherent in various means of visual expression, whether artistic or ideological, exist side by side and often react to one another. Chapters 6 to 9 trace the treatment of Arminius in reaction to the catastrophe that Germany suffered in 1945. Now the ideology that had appropriated him became thoroughly discredited, and creative artists, including filmmakers, either ignored or, more importantly, rejected it outright. The turn away from ideological or political overtones in the filmic portrayals of Romans, Germans, and other ancients in the 1960s is the subject of Chapter 6. In this chapter I also discuss a telling contrast from Communist-Bloc Europe that has been little known in the West: a historical film (*Dacii*) that is not about Arminius but whose plot reveals an astonishing parallel to the modern political myth of Arminius as liberator. Chapter 7 examines a variety of ways, including humor and comedy, in which representative artists from the 1970s to the 1990s dealt with the notorious past. An important stage arrives with the dominance of film and related media such as television and computer animation over our daily lives. The varieties of this phenomenon are the subject of the next two chapters: historical infotainment (Chapter 8), then history as epic spectacle (Chapter 9). My primary focus throughout this book is on Germany, as it has to be, but I adduce other examples whenever warranted. In particular, the survival of Nazi-type ideology in the United States is the subject of Chapter 10. Here I should emphasize that I am dealing not with modern American society at large but only with a small part on the radical fringe. But this minority’s views are crucial for my earlier points about the persistence of

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from Andreas Dörner, “Der Mythos der nationalen Einheit,” 391; cf. 392.

historical myth and ideology. Appendices then present crucial texts that are too long to be incorporated into their respective chapters. I hope that readers will turn to these at the appropriate moments.

My book attempts to extend and refine existing scholarship about certain aspects involving Arminius that have been considered to be well known. A particularly important example is National Socialism. Nazi propaganda will be a major focus of my book as an example of the abuse of Germanic (and German) history.<sup>3</sup> Nazism represents a prime instance of the pernicious use of myths about the past. In Nazi propaganda, the myth of Arminius acquired a notable and wholly new significance for the Nazis' seizure of power. But the myth could not have had this importance had it not been prominent in German history and culture since at least the Napoleonic era. The Nazi party made extensive propaganda use of Arminius and of the *Hermannsdenkmal*. The elections of January 1933 brought the Nazis into local and, as a result, national levels of government. The importance of the elections held in the state of Lippe for their *Machtergreifung* ("seizure of power") is well attested. (*Machtergreifung* was an official Nazi term, along with *Machtübernahme*: "takeover of power.") But it is less well known, except to a handful of specialists, that the Nazis considered these local elections as a test case, a *Testwahl*, in their bid for national power. Why should they have focused on this largely rural and comparatively small area? The answer is Hermann. A book-length but rare and today largely unknown account of the election campaign was written by a Nazi eyewitness in retrospect (and in celebration). I quote a number of its important passages in Chapter 3, which contains a detailed argument about the significance of Hermann for the outcome of the elections that year. The result even points us to one crucial aspect of my topic: Arminius' myth accomplished something that other potent, or even more potent, historical myths did not. At that moment the Arminius myth was an integral part of a pivotal point in modern German history, with European and eventually world-historical repercussions in its wake. My book thus contributes a corrective to standard scholarship on the process by which the Nazis seized power after devastating election defeats in 1932. As Hitler's biographer Ian Kershaw well put it: "The events of January 1933 amounted to an extraordinary political drama. It was a drama that unfolded largely out of sight of the German people. . . . There was no inevitability about Hitler's accession to power."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Blumenberg, *Präfiguration*, is the most recent examination of the topic to date, showing that the Nazis attempted to revive not history but the myths and legends of Alexander the Great, Frederick the Great, and Napoleon. In this, their focus appears to have been military glory and conquest, especially as far as Napoleon was concerned. In Germany, however, the historical image of Napoleon, conqueror of German lands, had been quite different. Cf. below, Chapter 2.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from Kershaw, *Hitler*, 413 and 424.

The common view, from which I dissent to a certain degree if not entirely, may be conveniently summarized by this recent restatement:

Am 15. Januar 1933 war in Lippe Landtagswahl—die letzte vor dem historischen 30. Januar 1933. Hitler, der eigens mit einem Flugzeug von München in die Provinz geflogen wurde, griff in das Arsenal deutscher Mythen, und er hatte damit Erfolg. Denn am 15. Januar wurde die NSDAP mit 39,5 Prozent der Stimmen die stärkste Partei in Lippe. . . . Es war lediglich ein historischer Zufall, dass die Wahl am 15. Januar 1933 die nächste war, die Hitler noch retten konnte. So bekamen die Lipper Wähler eine Rolle, die ihr tatsächliches Gewicht völlig überstieg. Bewegt von der eigenen historischen Bedeutung feierte man im “Hermannsland” von nun an den 15. Januar bis 1945 als Erinnerungstag mit dem Anspruch, die Lipper Wahl habe Hitler an die Macht gebracht. Für den Diktator war die Wahl in Lippe jedoch lediglich eine Episode. Der “Führer” selbst besuchte “das germanische Kernland” nur noch ein einziges Mal.

On January 15, 1933, the election for the regional parliament [*Landtag*] was held in Lippe—the last before the historic date of January 30, 1933. Hitler, who had been brought by airplane from Munich into this hinterland for just this purpose, seized upon the store of German myths and achieved success. For on January 15 the NSDAP became the strongest party in Lippe with 39.5 per cent of the votes. . . . It was merely a historical accident that the election of January 15 was the last that could still save Hitler. In this way the voters of the Lippe region assumed a part that utterly exceeded their actual importance. Moved by their own historic significance, they celebrated January 15, from now on until 1945, throughout “Hermann’s country” and claimed that the election in Lippe had brought Hitler to power. For the dictator, however, the election in Lippe was no more than an interlude. The “Führer” himself visited “the Germanic heartland” only one more time.<sup>5</sup>

Most of this assessment is unobjectionable, but a few doubts remain. If the *timing* of the election was an accident of history, was its *result* merely accidental, too? Clearly, such is not the case. The NSDAP campaign was orchestrated carefully, energetically, and successfully—as granted here—and only in this way could yield the result it did yield. If we keep in mind that this result, and this result alone, made possible the turning point that came two weeks later, then we might

<sup>5</sup> Quoted from Buchinger, “Teutoburger Wald 9 n. Chr.,” 36.



be more inclined to speak of a *historic* rather than a *historical* accident.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the locals were not all that wrong. In all multiparty forms of government—and the Weimar Republic was one of them—a comparatively small party can assume a disproportionate weight in a coalition government after an election. The history of the Federal Republic of Germany has furnished several examples.

Did Hitler in fact take only little further notice of the Lippe region once it had served its one but crucial purpose? Even if this was so, it is hardly decisive for a correct understanding of the events that January. And, as Chapter 3 will also show, Hitler by no means neglected Hermann-Arminius after 1933, even if the mythic liberator never became a main focus of Nazi propaganda. The successful modern liberator of his country could consolidate his historic significance by turning to other and more familiar figures from German history, such as Frederick the Great. Still, the statement about Hitler returning only once contradicts a specialist's report, published decades earlier, that January 15 was a day of commemoration and celebration by the Nazi party every year, particularly in 1943, the ten-year anniversary of the election:

Hitler kam des öfteren zu diesem Ereignis nach Lippe zurück und nutzte die Chance, eine Rede zu halten. Noch 1943 gab das Gaupresseamt Westfalen-Nord eine Gedenkbroschüre heraus, in der außer Hitler alle Parteigrößen Grußbotschaften an das lippische Volk richteten und den 'Wahlsieg' erneut kommentierten.

Hitler repeatedly returned to Lippe for such [celebratory] occasions and availed himself of the opportunity to give a speech. As late as 1943 the publication office of the *Gau* ["district"—a Nazi term] of Northern Westphalia published a commemorative booklet in which all party leaders, including Hitler, addressed messages of greetings to the people of Lippe and newly commented on their "election victory."<sup>7</sup>

One additional detail, perhaps minor if considered in isolation but telling when placed into the wider context of the present book, may be worth considering

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Turner, *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power*, 54 ("It was one of the numerous strokes of good luck in Hitler's career that just when he desperately needed a chance to demonstrate that his movement had not lost its momentum, an election came due in Lippe") and especially 66: "Despite the dubious aspects of the Nazis' self-proclaimed triumph in Lippe, it unquestionably amounted to an important plus for Hitler. The election success came just in time to revive flagging hopes in the Nazi ranks that his uncompromising stance would lead to total power. . . . Hitler did not wait long to exploit this."

<sup>7</sup> Quoted from Ciolek-Kümper, *Wahlkampf in Lippe*, 285. On the same page she quotes a passage each by Alfred Rosenberg and Joseph Goebbels from the brochure mentioned. Both texts, but especially Goebbels's, are worth keeping in mind.

here. At one point during his interrogations at the Nuremberg Trials, Baldur von Schirach, the former Reichsjugendführer (Leader of the Reich's Youth) and head of the Hitler Youth, was asked about his organization's quasi-religious indoctrination of German boys. Von Schirach denied any direct "comparison between Hitler and God" but then went into further detail:

It is true that during the long period of years in which I believed in Hitler, I saw in him a man sent by God to lead the people. That is true. I believe any great man in history—and in the past I considered Hitler such a man—may be regarded as being sent by God.

This answer prompts the interrogator to turn to "Document 2436-PS, USA-859," which contains a list of names from which Hitler Youth camp leaders can choose, as part of flag parades, the paroles or "mottoes, I guess you would say, for the day." Next, he asks von Schirach about these names: "They are all political or military heroes of Germany, I expect, aren't they?" Most but not all of the personal names on the list are names of such heroes; every one mentioned is a great man in history. Von Schirach begins to read the list. The first name he utters is that of Arminius.<sup>8</sup>

Why make a big deal about this list during the Nuremberg trials? The answer appears clear from the immediate context in which the list was brought up—Hitler as quasi-religious savior of Germany—and from several of the political and military heroes named on it: after Arminius, kings Geiserich, Teja, and Widukind; medieval and Prussian kings, including Frederick the Great; Prussian strategists Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, and Blücher; battle sites of World War I, with mention of Baron Richthofen, the flying ace—all culminating in place names and catch phrases commemorating the victory of Nazism throughout Germany. Von Schirach's American interrogator clearly thought the list important and worth having it preserved in the records. Yes, it all began with Arminius and culminated in Hitler. We will encounter more of this particular topic in Chapter 3. Evidently, then, a thorough reexamination of *all* the circumstances pertaining to the regional and nationwide elections of 1933 and their aftermath until 1945 that involve Arminius may be in order. Such a task I cannot accomplish in this book, but I wish at least to open the discussion of this topic anew. Nor do

<sup>8</sup> The quotations are from *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal*, vol. 14 (*Official Text in the English Language*), 478 (May 24, 1946). A partial translation of Document 2436-PS, including the list of names, is in *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, vol. 5, 120. The original list appeared in Claus Dörner (ed.), *Freude Zucht Glaube: Handbuch für die kulturelle Arbeit im Lager* [i.e., of the Hitler Youth], 64. This 1937 edition was followed by revised and expanded editions in 1939, 1941, and 1943. The words in the manual's main title mean "Joy Discipline Belief."

I expect all my readers to agree with all my points or conclusions. If, dissenting from my view, readers adduce further considerations that may throw a clearer light on this complex but also fascinating moment in history, I will be content with having provided the impulse. If they agree, I hope that they will regard the importance for history of myth and ideology with sharpened understanding, at least as far as Arminius is concerned.

Much less widely known than the details of the 1933 local election campaign is the importance of a pre-Nazi-era event that had also taken place in Detmold. In hindsight, it throws an uncanny light on what was to come almost exactly nine years later. The opening night in February 1924 of *Die Hermannschlacht*, the historical spectacle film already mentioned, became a major nationalist phenomenon, even if it was only short-lived. The program book that accompanied the film shows a noticeably higher degree of political-ideological sensationalism than other publications of this sort, whose very nature predisposes them to hyperbole. In addition, a poem specially composed for the occasion was delivered in front of the screen that would soon display its own images of history. The film's premiere was a key moment of interaction between the verbal and the visual. In this particular case, texts and images together furnish us with a unique insight into a decade that was to prove crucial for German and European history and eventually even for world history. This is the subject of Chapter 4.

The advances in the realm of visual technology that began with photography and led on to cinema now include a variety of digital media and creative and analytical tools that are not only useful but also virtually indispensable for close analyses of moving images. So the moment seems right for a book to address that part in the reception history of Arminius that is based on, or at least related to, the availability of visual technology, from film to television to computers. Laura Mulvey's summary is worth keeping in mind: "New ways of consuming old movies on electronic and digital technologies should bring about a 'reinvention' of textual analysis and a new wave of cinephilia."<sup>9</sup> I have elsewhere examined this topic in connection with what I have termed *classical film philology*.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout this book I understand the term *image* in a wider sense than readers may at first assume. It is meant as shorthand for artistic, commercial, and ideological expressions that involve something visual either exclusively, such as paintings, photographs, graphics, sculpture, and architecture, or in combination with words, such as stage plays, Anselm Kiefer's art, and especially moving images on our cinema, television, and computer screens. Historical myth is at my book's center. In the twentieth century, my primary

<sup>9</sup> Quoted from Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, 160.

<sup>10</sup> I refer readers to Martin M. Winkler, *Cinema and Classical Texts*, 20–69 (chapter titled "A Certain Tendency in Classical Philology").

focus of attention, such myth has been expressed most successfully in moving images, and for this reason film and television receive greater attention than other media. Still, related aspects of historical recreations and of ideological perspectives on history, either glorifying or critical, form parts of my book as well. Painting and the stage are for us important modern variations on the myth of Arminius. Prominent examples are Angelika Kauffmann's painting of Arminius returning from his victory and Werner Peiner's tapestry depicting that victory, both of which decorated the New Chancellery of Adolf Hitler.<sup>11</sup> These works are examined in Chapter 3. Kiefer's engagement with nationalist myth in the 1970s (Chapter 7) constitutes a specific and especially important form of what Germans call *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. The term refers to the intellectual and psychological processes of critically examining the Fascist past in order to come to terms with its burden. Kiefer's *Varus* (1976) was therefore an appropriate choice to furnish the very first image in a major German essay collection on the Battle of 9 AD that was published in 2012.<sup>12</sup>

Claus Peymann's stage production of Heinrich von Kleist's drama about the defeat of Varus, preserved on 16mm film for public-television broadcast, is another significant instance of this approach to the past in Germany (also in Chapter 7). Since ours is an age of multimedial images, my book attempts to take this side of modern popular and artistic engagements with the past into some measure of consideration. Our media age and its creative and technical roots represent a new phase in the reception of the past, primarily but not exclusively through the varieties of moving images that now inundate us: film, television, computer graphics, animation. I illustrate the variety of media and the similarities in how they deal with the Arminius myth by means of representative examples. These examples will comment on each other, as it were. The works of Anselm Kiefer are cases in point, combining the verbal (words written into the images) and the visual (the painted images themselves). Even if his canvases do not present movement, they do present the fusion of artistic media that is now the order of the day. Readers who become aware of certain gaps left open in individual chapters will, I hope, fill these by pursuing matters further on their own. My references to other artistic works and to scholarly sources are meant to provide them with guidance in this regard.

One scholarly source without which my book could not have been undertaken is the fundamental work of historian Dieter Timpe. As will be seen repeatedly, Timpe's insights into and deductions from the ancient records, primarily the literary ones, pertain directly to my topic. Regrettably, Timpe's research has

<sup>11</sup> For a survey see Beyroth, "Steh auf, wenn du Armine bist . . ." More on Kauffmann's painting in Chapter 3.

<sup>12</sup> Baltrusch, Hegewisch, Meyer, Puschner, and Wendt (eds.), *2000 Jahre Varusschlacht*, V.

not been translated into English, so I include translations of several key passages together with the original texts to facilitate readers' engagement with his work. The following brief excerpts from a British review of *Arminius-Studien* will immediately make clear how indispensable Timpe is and will remain for all future work on the history, myth, and reception of Arminius and his times:

The final picture that emerges is one that carries conviction and illuminates the general theme of the historical significance of Arminius. . . . Timpe's book is all the more valuable as the work of a German scholar, freed from preconceptions that have flourished not only among his compatriots, preconceptions natural enough in a century of rampant and self-conscious nationalism in Western Europe. And his conclusions, as he rightly claims, do nothing to diminish the true glory of Arminius.<sup>13</sup>

Timpe's studies of Arminius and of Roman-German relations are revisionist in an impeccably scholarly way. Such revisionism takes an impartial look at historical sources and is the exact opposite of the kinds of historical revisionism that is ideological in nature.

A word on my quotations from and translations of modern primary and secondary source texts is in order as well. My analyses draw on a wide variety of works not usually found in one and the same context. For this reason I support my views and conclusions with a larger amount of quotations than may be deemed strictly necessary. I do so for the sake of presenting as solid an argument as is feasible. Several of the verbal and visual works I discuss, including some films, are either rare or familiar only to specialists. Equally, some of the important historical scholarship I adduce is not easily accessible or has never been translated into English. In order to make my argument easier to follow for those readers unfamiliar with the one or the other of the languages in which particular texts were published, I first quote excerpts in the original and then give English translations. All translations not accompanied by references are my own. This procedure will enable bilingual or multilingual readers immediately to check my conclusions against the texts on which they are based; it will also aid those who wish to pursue their own research by giving them easy access to texts they can cite without having to chase after sometimes elusive originals. By contrast, ancient texts widely available in scholarly editions and in translation are quoted only in English, except for occasional brief passages of Roman poetry.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted from Gray, "Arminius," 61 and 63. All of Timpe's works important for my topic are listed in my bibliography.

Quotations from, and in a few cases about, Anselm Kiefer are taken from recent and easily accessible publications in English, with references to the original German versions given in footnotes. In the notes I cite modern primary and secondary sources in abbreviated form: last names of authors or editors and main titles of books, articles, and other publications. Full references to everything so cited may be found in my bibliography. Exceptions, intended to avoid ambiguities, occur when more than one author bears the same last name and when the full title of a particular work is useful in the context in which I cite it.

Several chapters deal with terminology coined by the Nazis and with words or expressions whose meanings have been thoroughly corrupted by Nazi use. Translations can only approximate these meanings and their connotations.<sup>14</sup> In the case of *Volk* and its adjective *völkisch*, which are both central to Nazi ideology, translations are usually pointless. I have therefore kept both German words, except in some minor instances. On some occasions I use the German adjective in an English sentence to point to certain implications warranted by the context.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, a brief explanation of my use of the key words *Germany* and *Germans* may be helpful, too, since they occur in two other languages in the works I deal with: Latin and German. Historically, the region that the ancient Romans called *Germania* (inhabited by *Germani*; in German: *Germanen*) is not identical with what today is called in German *Deutschland* (inhabited by *Deutsche*) and in English *Germany* (inhabited by *Germans*). It is worth remembering that only the Romans called the country *Germania* and the natives *Germani*; the tribes themselves had no concept of such a unified national or racial entity.<sup>16</sup> This

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I repeatedly adduce Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus*, for references and quotations. The most fascinating contemporary study of the Nazification of the German language is Klemperer, *LTI: Notizbuch eines Philologen*; in English: *The Language of the Third Reich: LTI—Lingua Tertii Imperii: A Philologist's Notebook*. Klemperer hid the material for his book under the double disguise of a Latin title (*Lingua Tertii Imperii*, "The Language of the Third Reich") and its abbreviation (*LTI*).

<sup>15</sup> On the term *völkisch* and its meaning see Puschner, Schmitz, and Ulbricht (eds.), *Handbuch zur "Völkischen Bewegung" 1871–1918*; Puschner, *Die völkische Bewegung im wilhelminischen Kaiserreich* and "Germanenideologie und völkische Weltanschauung"; Broszat, "Die völkische Ideologie und der Nationalsozialismus"; von Schnurbein and Ulbricht (eds.), *Völkische Religiosität und Krisen der Moderne*; and Schmitz and Vollnhals (eds.), *Völkische Bewegung—Konservative Revolution—Nationalsozialismus*. On the idea in connection with Germanic antiquity see Steuer, "Das 'völkisch' Germanische in der deutschen Ur- und Frühgeschichtsforschung," with extensive references. Cf. Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book*, 182–213 and 274–279 (nn.; chapter titled "White Blood"). On Arminius-Hermann as the first *völkisch* German see Bennhold, "'Hermann—der erste Deutsche.'"

<sup>16</sup> On the origin of the *Germani* and the meaning and ancient uses of their name (cf. Tacitus, *Germania* 2.3) see the modern survey by Lund, "Zur Gesamtinterpretation der 'Germania' des Tacitus," 1956–1988 ("Anhang: Zur Entstehung des Namens und Begriffs 'Germani'"). He concludes (1987) that the name's etymology is unknown and that the term was used by the Romans

circumstance alone shows that references to *Germanien* or *Deutschland* that are often put into the mouths of ancient characters in nationalist or other ideological works and in stage dramas, novels, or films are anachronistic. Such anachronisms reveal ahistorical thinking. They are a basic form of mythmaking and point to history's susceptibility to such mythmaking.

The German language distinguishes between modern *Deutschland* and ancient to pre-modern *Germanien*, equally between *Deutsche* and *Germanen*. This distinction breaks down in English, for *Germanen* and *Deutsche* are both *Germans* and do not live in *Germania* but in *Germany*. By necessity, and to avoid clumsy circumlocutions or parenthetical explanations in my translations, I generally render the Latin and German names for region and people by modern English equivalents. So *Deutsche* are *Germans*; *Germanen* are usually *ancient Germans*. But this necessity is actually a kind of virtue, as we will see, since it illustrates on a small linguistic scale what nationalist ideology argues or emphasizes on a larger scale: that there is no major distinction between past and present, that modern *Deutsche* are or should be just like their ancestral *Germanen*. An exception is the adjective *germanisch* (rather than *deutsch*), which I render as *Germanic*, not *German*. Christian Dietrich Grabbe's drama *Die Hermannsschlacht* ("Hermann's Battle"), which I adduce in several contexts, affords me a literary justification. During an early stage of his fight against the Romans, Hermann exclaims: "*Deutschland!*" Some of his men are puzzled by this: "He often talks about that. Where actually is this Germany?" ("*Er spricht oft davon. Wo liegt das Deutschland eigentlich?*") They propose several regions inhabited by different tribes, but Hermann ends their dispute: "Let's strike them, now and always united, and the different names will do no harm" ("*Schlagen wir jetzt und immer nur gemeinsam zu und die verschiedenen Namen schaden nicht*").<sup>17</sup>

since the time of Julius Caesar as a collective name for all native tribes east of the Rhine. Classic studies of the subject are Norden, *Die germanische Urgeschichte in Tacitus' Germania*, 312–450, especially 335–351, and *Alt-Germanien*.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from Grabbe, *Die Hermannsschlacht* 353.30–40. Here and elsewhere, I quote from or refer to the text of this play according to page and line numbering in Grabbe, *Werke*, vol. 3.



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Wojciech Bejda kindly made some of the historical picture postcards in his collection available to me. Several images that document the Nazis' (and, in one case, their enemy's) use of Arminius-Hermann in the regional election campaign of January 1933 appear by generous permission of Brigitte and Wilfried Mellies. The *Brigitte und Wilfried Mellies Stiftung*, comprising their extensive collection of Hermann memorabilia, is now housed in the Lippisches Landesmuseum, Detmold. The helpful and friendly staff at the Filmmuseum of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin, gave me access to its holdings on the Nazi propaganda film *Ewiger Wald* and allowed me the use of a poster. Gabriele Jäckl of the Deutsches Theatermuseum, Munich, provided me with an illustration of Claus Peymann's production of *Die Hermannsschlacht* by Heinrich von Kleist. Paul Angel, of *The Barnes Review*, gave me the cover image of that publication's twenty-fifth anniversary issue, featuring Arminius.

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environment of sustenance of intellectual and other kinds (*tu ne quaesieris*) and has done so in a most extraordinary and gentlemanly fashion.

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# Introduction

## *History, Myth, Media*

“Quintilius Varus, give me back my legions!” Emperor Augustus is reported to have uttered this anguished cry on several occasions after the Romans’ traumatic defeat beyond the border of *Germania* in September of 9 AD.<sup>1</sup> Three legions, three cavalry units, and six cohorts of auxiliaries were almost completely annihilated. The legionary eagles were lost. Publius Quintilius (or Quinctilius) Varus, the Roman commander, threw himself upon his sword. Varus had been installed as legate in 6 or more likely 7 AD. His interference in the native tribes’ civil administration and legislation and his taxation across the Rhine caused a conspiracy among them. Its heads were the Cheruscan chieftains Segimer and his son Arminius. The latter name is occasionally given in other variants: Hariminius, Ariminius, and Armenius. Arminius had achieved the rank of tribune in the Roman army; accompanied Tiberius, the future emperor, on his campaigns in Germany; and received Roman citizenship and equestrian status. But Varus’ policies turned Arminius against Rome. Segimer and Arminius lured Varus and his legions deep into the forest primeval and then sprang a deadly trap. Further Roman expansion into Germany ceased. Arminius continued his resistance to Rome until he was treacherously killed by relatives eight years later, when he had become too powerful.

The biography of Arminius has been enveloped in legend since antiquity. Only recent scholarship has been able to strip it of its ahistorical accretions. In this, the studies of Dieter Timpe have proven fundamental.<sup>2</sup> Timpe’s conclusions

<sup>1</sup> Suetonius, *The Deified Augustus* 23.2; repeated in Orosius, *History Against the Pagans* 6.21.27. Cf. Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 56.23.1.

<sup>2</sup> His work on Arminius is best accessible in two monographs: Timpe, *Arminius-Studien* and *Römisch-germanische Begegnung in der späten Republik und frühen Kaiserzeit*. The second of these volumes updates articles published individually over the years. Below, references to and quotations of the latter will be according to this reprint, with bibliographical citation of an article’s prior publication provided upon its first mention.

may be summarized as follows: Arminius served in the Roman army from 6 to 9 AD. As an officer under Varus he led a mutiny of German auxiliary troops, including the Cherusicans he had commanded before, against the legions of the Roman Rhine army. This revolt has traditionally been regarded as the uprising of a whole nation against its oppressors. But recent scholarship shows us a much more nuanced picture of ethnic identities and characteristics among ancient tribes. As a result it has become evident that the revolt was, instead, an internal military matter that remained within the Romans' local administration until the time of the actual Battle. Arminius, whom Varus trusted implicitly, took advantage of the unrest that existed among the Cherusicans' neighbors, the Suebi, to trick Varus into leading a force of three legions to an unknown part of the country well beyond the Roman border in order to attack them there.<sup>3</sup>

## History as Myth and Ideology

In the second half of the twentieth century, historical scholarship has significantly advanced our understanding of the defeat of Varus, the *clades Variana*, as it has often been called in Latin since antiquity.<sup>4</sup> Over centuries, historians, archaeologists, and amateur scholars have expended enormous ingenuity on attempts to identify the battlefield where Arminius had won his victory, adducing a total of more than seven hundred localities for the site. It seems finally to have been discovered in 1987 outside Kalkriese, near the city of Osnabrück in Lower Saxony.<sup>5</sup> Although geographical and archaeological doubts remain,

<sup>3</sup> The preceding is summarized from Timpe, "Neue Gedanken zur Arminius-Geschichte," in Timpe, *Römisch-germanische Begegnung in der späten Republik und frühen Kaiserzeit*, 216–241, specifically 228–229, 235, and 238. Timpe, 216 n. 1, reports that the lecture on which his article was based had encountered "strong resistance from nationalist circles" (*heftigen Widerspruch nationalistischer Kreise*), which necessitated responses from Timpe and his editors when it was first published. On this see the brief comments by Losemann, "Nationalistische Interpretationen der römisch-germanischen Auseinandersetzung," 430–431. On the same matter see further the important observations by Timpe, *Arminius-Studien*, 20–21, 49, and 108. On the size of Varus' forces cf. Timpe, *Arminius-Studien*, 109.

<sup>4</sup> So in Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 7.45.150; Suetonius, *The Deified Augustus* 23.1 and *Tiberius* 18.1. On the term *clades* see Albert, "Quid sit clades?" On the unusual expression *bellum Varianum*, attested on the tombstone (*CIL* 13.8648) of Marcus Caelius, the centurion in Legion XVIII who was killed in the battle, see Schillinger-Häfele, "Varus und Arminius in der Überlieferung," 126–128.

<sup>5</sup> The modern discoverer was an officer in the British army stationed at Osnabrück; his account appears in Clunn, *The Quest for the Lost Roman Legions*. Timpe, "Die 'Varusschlacht' in ihren Kontexten," 625–637, is a detailed and up-to-date evaluation of the matter; the entire article provides excellent access to the complex historical, historiographical, and archaeological aspects of the Battle and surveys the flood of recent publications (German-language only) that have appeared in connection with its bimillennium. Other recent summaries are Wolters, *Die Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald* and "Die Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald: Varus, Arminius und das römische Germanien";

ongoing excavations appear to confirm it as the authentic location. Just a little more than a century earlier, Theodor Mommsen, Germany's pre-eminent historian of ancient Rome, had already deduced that Kalkriese was the place of the Battle.<sup>6</sup> Traditionally the Battle was believed to have occurred in the Teutoburger Wald (Teutoburg Forest) southeast of Kalkriese.<sup>7</sup> Despite contrary archaeological evidence it is still generally referred to as the "Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald" ("Battle in the Teutoburg Forest").

History as written about great individuals of the past was the primary and occasionally exclusive focus of scholars and popularizers, until it came under critical scrutiny in recent decades. With noticeably few exceptions—as in the groundbreaking studies of Timpe—the historiography and mythography concerning Arminius is an illuminating example of how this tradition is still going strong. Why this should be so need not concern us from a theoretical or literary-historical point of view, but a few observations about how history has generally been understood may be useful. In "History," an essay published in 1841, Ralph Waldo Emerson observed: "There is one mind common to all individual men. . . . This human mind wrote history, and this must read it." He deduced from this:

It is the universal nature which gives worth to particular men and things. . . . We sympathize in the great moments of history . . . because there . . . the blow was struck *for us*, as we ourselves in that place would have done or applauded.

Our innate urge to connect or apply the past to ourselves, to our own times, and to how we envision our future, can easily cause us to turn history into myth or moral lesson; it even explains why we should wish to do so. As Emerson writes:

The instinct of the mind . . . betrays itself in the use we make of the signal narrations of history. Time dissipates to shining ether the

Moosbauer, *Die Varusschlacht*, especially 161–167 (on questions concerning the location of the Battle); and Baltrusch, "P. Quinctilius Varus und die *bella Variana*."

<sup>6</sup> Mommsen, *Die Örtlichkeit der Varusschlacht*. On Mommsen's identification of the site (without the name Kalkriese) and on the process by which he made it see now Frank Berger, "Mommsen und die Varusschlacht."

<sup>7</sup> It is to be hoped that the relocation of the Teutoburg Forest to "what is now southern Germany" by Toner, *Roman Disasters*, 19, is no more than an unintentional blunder. So is the "Teutenborg Forest" at Brailovsky, "The Epic Tableau," 132. Dando-Collins, *Legions of Rome*, consistently prints "Kalkreise." He also calls Detmold "Dortmold" (241), presumably influenced by the name of Dortmund, a city nowhere in the vicinity. More amusing is his anachronism about the Romans "not returning fire with javelins" during the Battle (245).

solid angularity of facts. . . . Who cares what the fact was, when we have made a constellation of it to hang in heaven an immortal sign? . . . “What is History,” said Napoleon, “but a fable agreed upon?” . . . All inquiry into antiquity . . . is the desire to do away with this wild, savage, and preposterous There or Then, and introduce in its place the Here and the Now.<sup>8</sup>

Emerson expressed his overall conclusion in a phrase that has become famous: “All history becomes subjective; in other words, there is properly no history; only biography.”<sup>9</sup>

Plutarch, the Greek biographer of great men, might well have agreed. Although he specifically distinguished writing history from writing biography, his approach to the latter is fully compatible with the former.<sup>10</sup> Plutarch emphasized the importance of details that can illuminate a historical figure’s personality better than great achievements:

fundamentally, outstanding excellence or degeneracy does not become evident in the most spectacular deeds; rather, it is often an insignificant act, a word or a joke that throws more of a characteristic light on someone’s character than battles with thousands of dead, the largest mobilizations of armies, or sieges of cities could do.<sup>11</sup>

This fits Arminius’ case very closely, if from a perspective contrary to Plutarch’s. Plutarch could often choose from an abundance of details for his biographies and, by selecting certain of these for inclusion, could give them historical significance. As we shall see, the very absence of such details about Arminius has prompted modern historians and biographers and others to fill in the gaps by speculation: details deduced from larger, if sometimes underreported, facts or circumstances. Unavoidably, in the historian’s desire to understand and explain,

<sup>8</sup> The quotations are from Emerson, “History,” 237, 238, 239, and 240–241. Emerson’s word *antiquity* encompasses all of the past and is not limited to classical antiquity.

<sup>9</sup> Emerson, “History,” 240.

<sup>10</sup> Scholars have repeatedly shown that Plutarch’s statement should not be overemphasized or interpreted too narrowly. Plutarch uses historical sources extensively and often includes major events such as battles in his biographies. Nor is ancient (or, for that matter, modern) biography a literary genre entirely separate from historiography. Cf., e.g., Wardman, *Plutarch’s Lives*, 4: “The form of the *Lives* . . . is dependent on the various types of historical writing . . . biography annexed certain practices which had already been suggested or deployed in historical writing.” On the subject see Pelling, *Plutarch and History*, especially 156–162 (section titled “Plutarch and Historiography,” in chapter on “Truth and Fiction in Plutarch’s Lives”).

<sup>11</sup> Plutarch, *Alexander* 1.2.

the factual record becomes inseparable from speculation, especially if such speculation is prompted by emotionalism. Just as history is close to biography, so biography often shades over into historical fiction, at least to a certain degree. These observations about Plutarch's biographies may tell us what an ancient biography of Arminius might have looked like if it had existed:

Without exception, the heroes of the Lives were public men whose activities, used by Plutarch as a clue to their character, had a decisive effect on some important historical events of their own lifetime. Whether he is justified or not, Plutarch thinks that outstanding men determine the course of historical events. . . . The character of the heroes cannot be divorced from their historical significance.<sup>12</sup>

Much of what has been written about Arminius, regardless of an individual author's own historical, political, or ideological background and surroundings, has proceeded from this Plutarchian assumption, whether justified by an author's knowledge of the facts or not. In this context it is also revealing that Plutarch, immediately after his words quoted above, compares his method to that of the painter: just as the face and its features reveal someone's character to the portraitist, so "the marks of the soul" enable the biographer to delineate someone's life in a coherent and thus meaningful way.<sup>13</sup> To Plutarch as to the painter, little things mean a lot. The very existence of Timpe's studies proves the points here outlined, for they would have been largely unnecessary if the historical record about Arminius had been more straightforward: clearer, more detailed, and much less ambiguous.

Elsewhere Plutarch gives us another clue about the impact of history and biography on those fascinated by them. He compares history with a mirror in which one may see one's own face and so endeavor to lead one's own life according to the virtues of the men one comes to know. These turn from strangers into friends, whose closeness ennobles one's own character. This process, Plutarch reveals, applied to himself as biographer.<sup>14</sup> Plutarch takes a wholly positive view of such inspiration from history's great men. But our love of history and the concomitant impulse to make it meaningful for ourselves is inseparable from the danger to adapt to our own purposes what we have come to love. The past as shown in history or biography can easily become subservient to the present: our own outlook on life. Moreover, those in prominent social or political positions can manipulate others about certain figures from a common past. As my book

<sup>12</sup> Wardman, *Plutarch's Lives*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Plutarch, *Alexander* 1.3. The same comparison occurs at Plutarch, *Cimon* 2.3.

<sup>14</sup> Plutarch, *Aemilius* 1.

will demonstrate, this is what happened to the history of Arminius. Mirrors reflect, but they may also distort. Umberto Eco coined the term *aberrant decoding* for this phenomenon, especially in the age of mass media.<sup>15</sup>

Although my book is not specifically concerned with political theory or terminology, a few words on the concept of nationalism, which will feature prominently on many pages, may be useful nevertheless. Its intellectual, cultural, and political developments began with Romanticism and continued toward patriotism and nationalism. Twentieth-century totalitarian ideologies, especially Fascism and Nazism, then built on earlier nationalist fervor. All this has been well documented. Here the philosophical essays by Isaiah Berlin are pertinent. In one titled "Nationalism" Berlin observed that "the romantic movement . . . in Germany . . . celebrated the collective will, untrammelled by rules which men could discover by rational methods, the spiritual life of the people in whose activity—or impersonal will—creative individuals could participate."<sup>16</sup> Earlier in the same essay Berlin had defined nationalism, especially of the kind prevalent in Italy and Germany, as "the elevation of the interests of the unity and self-determination of the nation to the status of the supreme value before which all other considerations must, if need be, yield at all times."<sup>17</sup>

Eric Hobsbawm devoted several books to the topic; they provide a solid first orientation (and more).<sup>18</sup> Hobsbawm characterized nationalism in this way:

the word "nationalism" itself first appeared at the end of the nineteenth century to describe groups of right-wing ideologists in France and Italy, keen to brandish the national flag against foreigners, liberals and socialists and in favour of that aggressive expansion of their own state which was to become so characteristic of such movements. . . . Though it originally described only a right-wing version of the phenomenon, the word "nationalism" . . . came to be used also for all movements to

<sup>15</sup> Eco, "Towards a Semiotic Inquiry into the Television Message." His essay, reprinted several times, was first published in Italian in 1965.

<sup>16</sup> Berlin, "Nationalism," 440.

<sup>17</sup> Berlin, "Nationalism," 427; a longer definition appears at 431–436.

<sup>18</sup> Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1798–1848*, especially 132–148 and 325 (nn.; chapter titled "Nationalism"); *The Age of Capital, 1848–1875*, especially 82–97 and 321 (nn.; chapter titled "Building Nations"); and *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914*, especially 142–164 and 367–368 (nn.; chapter titled "Waving Flags: Nations and Nationalism"). See further Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*. Anthony D. Smith, *The Antiquity of Nations*, 1–29 ("Introduction: Paradigms of Nationalism"), presents a diachronic and typological overview and additional references. A useful German introduction to the concept of nationalism is Heinrich August Winkler, "Der Nationalismus und seine Funktionen." On the origin and history of German nationalism until the 1960s see especially the older but still indispensable study by Snyder, *Roots of German Nationalism*, with detailed bibliography. Langewiesche, "Nation, Nationalismus, Nationalstaat," is a detailed and still valuable survey of research on the topic, with extensive references.

whom the “national cause” was paramount in politics: that is to say for all demanding the right to self-determination, i.e. in the last analysis to form an independent state, for some nationally defined group. For the number of such movements, or at least of leaders claiming to speak for such movements, and their political significance, increased strikingly in our period [1875–1914]. . . . Where national identification became a political force, it therefore formed a sort of general substratum of politics.<sup>19</sup>

Although I use the term *ideology* in a general sense, I still follow the model developed by Karl Dietrich Bracher, a pre-eminent political scientist and historian of the twentieth century, especially of the Weimar Republic and Nazi Germany (and beyond). Hence I adhere, more often than the following pages may reveal, to Bracher’s study *The Age of Ideologies: A History of Political Thought in the Twentieth Century*.<sup>20</sup> Bracher offers a useful nonspecialist definition of ideology, understanding the term “in the sense of the most comprehensive system of ideas possible, especially concerning the relationship Man-Society-Politics.”<sup>21</sup> What he says about totalitarian ideologies may usefully be kept in mind for my subsequent discussions of German nationalism and National Socialism:

Totalitarian ideologies reveal with especial clarity the nature and function of the ideologization process in state and society. . . . At the centre of this process is a tendency towards an extreme simplification of complex realities: the claim that they can be reduced to *one* truth and, at the same time, divided into a dichotomy of good and evil, right and wrong, friend or foe, that the world can be grasped with a single explanatory model in bipolar terms, in the manner attempted more specifically by the Marxist class theory or the National Socialist racial theory.

The twentieth century, Bracher continues, “has become the century of totalitarian seduction because it was, and has remained, an age of ideologies.”<sup>22</sup> It is worth remembering in our context that Bracher was originally a classical scholar and wrote his dissertation on intellectual trends in the post-Augustan Roman Empire.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914*, 142–144.

<sup>20</sup> Full reference in my bibliography.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted from Bracher, *The Age of Ideologies*, 3. Bracher, 2–3, outlines the differences between contemporary and earlier forms of ideology.

<sup>22</sup> Bracher, *The Age of Ideologies*, 5 and 6. Additional references to Bracher will appear in Chapter 3.

<sup>23</sup> Bracher, *Verfall und Fortschritt im Denken der frühen römischen Kaiserzeit: Studien zum Zeitgefühl und Geschichtsbewusstsein des Jahrhunderts nach Augustus* (i.e., “Decline and Progress in the Thought of the Early Roman Imperial Period: Studies in the Sense of the Times and Historical Awareness



My book is, for the most part, concerned with the mythical-historical Arminius of modern Germans. But it will also consider a recent American view of Arminius that continues Neo-Nazi ideology and apology. In the present context, however, a quick look across the Channel is instructive as well. In 1851 Edward Shepherd Creasy published his book *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World from Marathon to Waterloo* on the subject of what he called “the great crises of times past, by which the characteristics of the present were determined.”<sup>24</sup> Creasy (1812–1878) was professor of history at London University and later became chief justice of Ceylon (and Sir Edward). He devoted the fifth chapter of his book to Arminius’ victory. His perspective on the Battle in the Teutoburg Forest is revealing, if not today downright astonishing:

The narrative of one of these great crises, of the epoch A.D. 9, when Germany took up arms for her independence against Roman invasion, has for us this special attraction—that it forms part of our own national history. Had Arminius been supine or unsuccessful, our Germanic ancestors would have been enslaved or exterminated in their original seats along the Eyder [Eider] or the Elbe. This island would never have borne the name of England, and [we] . . . would have been utterly cut off from existence. . . . Arminius is far more truly one of our national heroes than Caractacus; and it was our own primeval fatherland that the brave German rescued when he slaughtered the Roman legions eighteen centuries ago, in the marshy glens between the Lippe and the Ems.<sup>25</sup>

Creasy’s words were a close fit for contemporary nationalist beliefs in Germany. Such nationalism later characterized the cultural climate prevalent in Wilhelmine Germany and, if with obvious changes and developments, during the Weimar Republic (1919–1932) and the rise of a new empire that came into existence in January 1933. Although Germans may have raised an eyebrow at the British claim that Arminius was really one of theirs, there existed a long tradition that

During the Century After Augustus”; diss. University of Tübingen, 1948). A revised version was published in 1987 (reference in Bibliography).

<sup>24</sup> Creasy, *Decisive Battles of the World*, 115, in a chapter titled “Victory of Arminius over the Roman Legions under Varus, A.D. 9.” (115–140). Here and elsewhere I quote from the revised American edition of 1899, which has supplementary chapters on the battles of Gettysburg, Sedan, Santiago, and Manila by John Gilmer Speed, thus bringing the book up to date. Creasy’s book was reprinted in variously titled, revised, and expanded versions down to the early twenty-first century.

<sup>25</sup> Creasy, *Decisive Battles of the World*, 115–116. Caractacus (better: Caratacus) was a British chieftain who famously if unsuccessfully rebelled against the Romans in the first century AD. Tacitus, *Annals* 12.33–38, describes his revolt.

associated the British with the ancient Germans.<sup>26</sup> One of the most noteworthy examples is this observation about British Parliamentaryism by Montesquieu in *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748):

If one wants to read the admirable work by Tacitus, *On the Mores of the Germans* [i.e. the *Germania*], one will see that the English have taken their idea of political government from the Germans. This fine system was found in the forests.<sup>27</sup>

Montesquieu here has in mind Tacitus' description of the ancient German people's assembly, later called *Thing*.<sup>28</sup> No less an authority than Edward Gibbon echoed Montesquieu's view and foreshadowed Creasy's at the beginning of his description of the ancient Germans in volume 1, chapter 9, of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776).

We will turn to the *Thing* in connection with the 1924 film *Die Hermannschlacht*. This is a minor work in the history of the cinema, but it is crucial for my topic as an expression of German nationalism in between the wars and for its wider implications. The film initiated a new phase in the historical myth about Arminius, for in the twentieth century the tale of his heroic victory could for the first time be told in moving images, a means of visual expression profoundly different from historical paintings or stage productions. Both theater and painting, however, strongly influenced the cinema, a well-known circumstance that needs no further elaboration here. Still, one little-known critical discussion of the matter that occurred in Germany in 1913 is revealing and perhaps amusing. In answer to the question who is

<sup>26</sup> On this see now Holsten, "Arminius the Anglo-Saxon," with discussion of Creasy at 347–350. Holsten, 348 n. 197, gives further information on the printing history of Creasy's book, which he calls a mega-bestseller (347). For the wider (and earlier) context see especially Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism*. See further Oergel, "The Redeeming Teuton." One other British book should be mentioned. Thomas Smith, *Arminius*, deals with German laws and constitutional customs from the time of Julius Caesar to Charlemagne. Among this book's chapter headings are "Varus," "Thusnelda," and "The Death of Arminius." Given the work's main title, it is no surprise that Smith should begin with quoting, in Latin and in its entirety, Tacitus' characterization of Arminius. Holsten, 352–353, briefly comments on Smith's book.

<sup>27</sup> Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, part 2, book 11, chapter 6 ("On the Constitution of England"); quoted from Cohler, Miller, and Stone (trs. and eds.), *Montesquieu: The Spirit of the Laws*, 165–166.

<sup>28</sup> Tacitus, *Germania* 11–12. Brief summaries in Kösters, *Mythos Arminius*, 135–138, and "Endlose Hermannsschlachten . . .," 244–246. Gonthier, *Montesquieu and England*, 107–142 and 197–202 (chapter titled "Cosmopolitan Constitutionalism: *L'Esprit des lois* [1748]"), gives a detailed interpretation, with extensive discussion of Tacitus. Singer, *Montesquieu and the Discovery of the Social*, 167 n. 2, dissents from Gonthier's view.

best suited to write dramatic texts for films, presumably screenplays and dialogue, critic Gustav Taudien called for none other than the painter: *Maler sind auch Dichter. Im speziellen Historien- und Genremaler* ("Painters are poets, too, especially painters of historical and genre scenes"). Films are therefore called on to put before their viewers' eyes, as vividly as in a painting, whatever circumstances have led up to the climactic moment shown by the painter. In this way a painting forms a worthy culmination point in a series of events that are not being depicted but that are clearly implied: everything that has led up to the moment shown on the canvas. The example Taudien advances as illustrative proof for his argument is related to the story of Arminius: Carl Theodor von Piloty's painting *Thusnelda im Triumphzug des Germanicus* ("Thusnelda in Germanicus' Triumphal Procession") of 1873.<sup>29</sup>

## The Fate of History in the Time of the Image

Visual as well as visual-and-verbal retellings of history form a significant part of my examination of how the events of and surrounding 9 AD came to be regarded. But neither painting nor theater has proven to be as decisive for an understanding of how ideologies manipulate the past as the cinema. Film eclipsed all other forms of art and communication in twentieth-century popular culture.<sup>30</sup>

The invention of photography in the nineteenth century had brought a new way of presenting and understanding the reality that the camera captured and that photographic images reproduced. The photograph, although originally in black and white or, later, tinted, established a link between static painted images and the moving images of the cinema. John Berger observes:

The camera isolated momentary appearances and in so doing destroyed the idea that images were timeless . . . the camera showed that the notion of time passing was inseparable from the experience of the visual (except in paintings). What you saw depended upon where you were when. What you saw was relative to your position in time and space. It was no longer possible to imagine everything converging on the human eye as on the vanishing point of infinity. . . . Every drawing or painting that used perspective proposed to the spectator that he was the unique centre of the world. The camera—and more

<sup>29</sup> Taudien, "Maler heraus!" The title does not mean "Away with Painters!" but the contrary: "Painters Forward!" My quotation from and summary of Taudien's article is taken from Diederichs, *Frühgeschichte deutscher Filmtheorie*, 76.

<sup>30</sup> What follows here is based on the longer discussion in Martin M. Winkler, *Cinema and Classical Texts*, 4–11, to which I direct interested readers.

particularly the movie camera [later]—demonstrated that there was no centre.

The invention of the camera changed the way men saw. The visible came to mean something different to them.<sup>31</sup>

The representation of reality in moving images that the film camera showed viewers—and the unreal that it also put before their eyes by means of trickery and special effects—further changed the way people saw and the meaning of what they saw. Media historian Siegfried Zielinski summarizes the power that the moving image exerted over its viewers:

The innovation of cinematography in the last decade of the nineteenth century was the expression and media vanishing point of technical, cultural, and social processes that are generally referred to as industrialisation. In the rhythmic projection of photographs arranged on perforated celluloid strips that outwitted human visual perception, in the anonymity of publicly accessible spaces vested with a highly intimate ambience, the human subjects who had been through industrialisation apparently discovered their appropriate and adequate communicative satisfaction. Reproducible dream worlds, staged for the eye and the ear, provided these subjects who had been rushed through the century of the steam engine, mechanisation, railways, and, lastly, electricity, with the material for satisfying their desires for rich sensory impressions, variety, diversions, escapism, but also for orientation.<sup>32</sup>

The last point here mentioned includes a special kind of orientation: that about history and its contemporary meaning.

An eloquent testimony to the crucial importance of the moving image came from French film pioneer Abel Gance at a time when the popular appeal of cinema was already well established. Gance had begun writing and acting in films in 1909 and directed his first film in 1911. He would continue directing until the 1960s. In the late 1920s Gance published two articles on the new ways of seeing that the cinema had brought about. In 1928 he commented on the novelty of moving images and their impact on people's ways of perception:

The most familiar objects have to be seen as if for the first time, producing a transmutation of all our values. This transformation of our way of

<sup>31</sup> Quoted from John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 17–18.

<sup>32</sup> Zielinski, *Audiovisions*, 11. The translator's clumsy rendition should not detract us from the soundness of the author's argument.

looking, in an absolutely new domain unfamiliar to our senses, is in my opinion the most wonderful of modern miracles.<sup>33</sup>

The year before, Gance had published an article with the prophetic title “The Time of the Image Has Come.” This was also the year that saw the release of his most famous film, the gigantic *Napoleon*. In his passionate encomium to cinema, Gance wrote:

In truth, the Time of the Image has come!

All the legends, all mythology and all the myths, all founders of religion and all religions themselves, all the great figures of history, all objective gleams of people’s imaginations over millennia—all of them await their resurrection to light, and the heroes jostle each other at our gates in order to enter. . . .

The Time of the Image has come!<sup>34</sup>

Throughout his essay, Gance repeats its title phrase in an incantatory manner, thereby stating his argument as emphatically as possible. In retrospect, he turns out to be correct to a higher degree than he is likely ever to have imagined. In the digital age the image, still or moving, has come to dominate to an unprecedented degree how we see ourselves and our world.<sup>35</sup> Equally, the image, primarily the moving image, dominates and often determines our views and our understanding of the past—the further away from us in time, the more effectively. The time of the historical image has come as well. Doubtless it is here to stay.

The image is the predominant means by which modern media reach mass audiences. For this reason I incorporate into my argument important aspects of other visual and visually influenced media and point to connections between texts and images, chiefly but not exclusively moving ones. I discuss a representative variety of verbal and visual media that exist side by side in the age of increasingly sophisticated technologies of mass communication.<sup>36</sup> Our way of seeing in the time of the photographic, cinematic, and digital image, often in combination of all these and yet others such as painting and the stage, constitutes a new phase

<sup>33</sup> Gance, “Le sens moderne—comment on fait un film”; quoted from the translation by King, *Abel Gance*, 56.

<sup>34</sup> Gance, “Le Temps de l’Image est venu,” 96. For background information about this essay see King, *Abel Gance*, 61.

<sup>35</sup> Apkon, *The Age of the Image*, is a primer on the subject. In view of his title, it is regrettable that the author is unaware of Gance and his enthusiastic expression.

<sup>36</sup> Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, 480–637 (chapters titled “Media: In the Middle of Things” and “Multimedia: The Digital Revolution”), is especially useful on this topic.

in our understanding of the past—and of the present, through whose eyes, natural and artificial, that past is viewed.

In *From Caligari to Hitler*, one of the most influential studies of the cinema ever written, Siegfried Kracauer argued that the films made in Germany between 1918 and 1932 foreshadowed the politics and culture of what was to come in 1933:

Inner life manifests itself in various elements and conglomerations of external life, especially in those almost imperceptible surface data which form an essential part of screen treatment. In recording the visible world—whether current reality or an imaginary universe—films therefore provide clues to hidden mental processes.

But why films and not some other medium of expression? “The films of a nation,” Kracauer wrote, “reflect its mentality in a more direct way than other artistic media.” Kracauer adduced two reasons. Films are “never the product of an individual.” And “films address themselves, and appeal, to the anonymous multitude. Popular films—or to be more precise, popular screen motifs—can therefore be supposed to satisfy existing mass desires.” Kracauer went on to observe:

What films reflect are not so much explicit credos as psychological dispositions—those deep layers of collective mentality which extend more or less below the dimension of consciousness. . . . The medium of the screen exceeds these sources [i.e., other mass media] in inclusiveness.<sup>37</sup>

Kracauer was by no means the first to address the psychological and emotional power that the moving image held over its viewer.<sup>38</sup> But he took the matter much further in the specific case he was examining. And he did so around the time in which German cinema in general and its Expressionist films in particular were the most highly respected and influential national cinema in the world. But the German cinema’s artistic quality was almost completely lost in the era

<sup>37</sup> All excerpts are from the “Introduction” to Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 7, 5, and 6. On Kracauer see Hake, *The Cinema’s Third Machine*, 247–270 and 314–317 (nn.); and Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer*, especially 75–94 and 126–128 (nn.; chapter on *From Caligari to Hitler*). Carroll, “The Cabinet of Dr. Kracauer,” rpt. in Carroll, *Interpreting the Moving Image*, 17–25 and 334–335 (nn.), is more critical about Kracauer’s book. Hake, *German National Cinema*, 26–58, and Kaes, “Film in der Weimarer Republik,” provide recent summaries of Weimar-era cinema. See also Saunders, “History in the Making.”

<sup>38</sup> Cf. the classic work by Münsterberg, *The Photoplay*, especially 122–130. The author, a German-American, was a psychologist.

that followed the Weimar Republic. Films in Nazi Germany were political tools. The abuse of cinematic images for ideological purposes set the stage for comparable later political manipulations, something that today, in the age of global image saturation in film and on television and in print and electronic media, is an unavoidable fact of life:

The unprecedented historical example of the Nazi media dictatorship lingers as a very disturbing prospect, especially now, as sophisticated and pervasive technologies for the transmission and manipulation of audiovisual materials increasingly define who we are and how we exist. . . . Indeed, one might speak of Nazi Germany's irrepressible imagemakers as postmodernity's secret sharers, as grasping entrepreneurs who profited from the industrialized means of enchantment, as master showmen who staged extravagant spectacles as the ultimate political manifestations.<sup>39</sup>

The American essayist, screenwriter, and historical novelist Gore Vidal once wrote about history and the film image: "In the end, he who screens the history makes the history."<sup>40</sup> Vidal's striking observation is even more significant in the twenty-first century, when still and moving images have become ubiquitous in a variety of portable electronic devices. Considered together, film, television, and various digital media no longer merely comment on history by recreating it, as has been the case with historical epic films, and no longer simply record it while it happens, as traditionally in photographs and documentary films and through live television coverage of breaking news. Now they can also influence history while it is being made. As has been well said, film and television have turned into *entr'actes* of history.<sup>41</sup> In this regard it is appropriate to remember the power of ideology. In Bracher's words:

Scientific and technological progress, far from equipping us to offer stronger resistance to ideological seduction, have in fact complicated the task facing the individual as a citizen: to think politics out for himself and participate in its shaping in order to oppose subjection to the exclusive claim of political creeds—and not the other way round, as ideologists have always wanted.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion*, 223. Cf. Tegel, *Nazis and the Cinema*, especially 9–73 and 235–247 (nn.).

<sup>40</sup> Vidal, *Screening History*, 81.

<sup>41</sup> I take this expression from the subtitle of Zielinski, *Audiovisions*. Zielinski is primarily concerned with media history, not history in general.

<sup>42</sup> Bracher, *The Age of Ideologies*, 6.