

A Concise History of GERMANY

Mary Fulbrook

SECOND EDITION



CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE

more information - www.cambridge.org/9780521833202

A Concise History of Germany

‘. . . a thunderingly good read . . . the best introduction to German history for the general reader’. *German History*

This book provides a clear and informative guide to the twists and turns of German history from the early middle ages to the present day. The multi-faceted, problematic history of the German lands has provided a wide range of debates and differences of interpretation. Mary Fulbrook provides a crisp synthesis of a vast array of historical material, and explores the interrelationships between social, political and cultural factors in the light of scholarly controversies.

First published in 1990, *A Concise History of Germany* appeared in an updated edition in 1992, and in a second edition in 2004. It is the only single-volume history of Germany in English which offers a broad, general coverage. It has become standard reading for all students of German, European studies and history, and is a useful guide to general readers, members of the business community and travellers to Germany.

CAMBRIDGE CONCISE HISTORIES

A Concise History of Germany

CAMBRIDGE CONCISE HISTORIES

This is a new series of illustrated 'concise histories' of selected individual countries, intended both as university and college textbooks and as general historical introductions for general readers, travellers and members of the business community.

First titles in the series:

A Concise History of Germany

MARY FULBROOK

A Concise History of Greece

RICHARD CLOGG

A Concise History of France

ROGER PRICE

A Concise History of Britain, 1707-1795

W. A. SPECK

A Concise History of Portugal

DAVID BIRMINGHAM

A Concise History of Italy

CHRISTOPHER DUGGAN

A Concise History of Bulgaria

RICHARD CRAMPTON

A Concise History of South Africa

ROBERT ROSS

A Concise History of Brazil

BORIS FAUSTO

A Concise History of Mexico

BRIAN HAMNETT

A Concise History of Australia

STUART MACINTYRE

Other titles are in preparation

A Concise History of Germany

SECOND EDITION

MARY FULBROOK



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo,
Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521540711

© Cambridge University Press 1991

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1991
Reprinted eight times
Second edition 2004
13th printing 2012

Printed and Bound in the United Kingdom by the MPG Books Group

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-83320-2 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-54071-1 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy
of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication,
and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain,
accurate or appropriate.

CONTENTS

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Preface</i>	xv
1 INTRODUCTION: THE GERMAN LANDS AND PEOPLE	I
2 MEDIAEVAL GERMANY	9
The beginnings of German history	9
Germany in the early and high middle ages	13
Germany in the later middle ages	22
3 THE AGE OF CONFESSIONALISM, 1500–1648	33
The German Reformation: the early years	34
The German Peasants' War	40
The development of the German Reformation	43
Germany in the age of Counter-Reformation	50
The Thirty Years War	53
The Peace of Westphalia and the effects of the War	60
4 THE AGE OF ABSOLUTISM, 1648–1815	69
Absolutism and the rise of Prussia	72
Religion, culture and Enlightenment	84
The impact of the French Revolution	94
5 THE AGE OF INDUSTRIALISATION, 1815–1918	104
Restoration Germany, 1815–48	104
The revolutions of 1848	116
The unification of Germany	122
Germany under Bismarck	131
Society and politics in Wilhelmine Germany	137

	Culture in Imperial Germany	144
	Foreign policy and the First World War	148
6	DEMOCRACY AND DICTATORSHIP, 1918–45	155
	The Weimar Republic: origins and early years	156
	The period of apparent stabilisation	167
	The collapse of Weimar democracy	172
	The consolidation of Hitler's power	179
	Foreign policy and war	187
	Holocaust, resistance and defeat	197
7	THE TWO GERMANIES, 1945–90	205
	The creation of the two Germanies	205
	From establishment to consolidation	212
	Politics in the two Germanies, 1949–89	220
	Economy and society in West Germany	230
	Economy and society in the GDR, 1949–89	235
	The revolution of 1989 and the unification of Germany	243
8	THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY SINCE 1990	250
9	PATTERNS AND PROBLEMS OF GERMAN HISTORY	258
	<i>Suggestions for further reading</i>	262
	<i>Index</i>	272

ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATES

1	Kloster Grüssau in Silesia. Source: <i>Die schöne Heimat. Bilder aus Deutschland</i> (Leipzig: Verlag Karl Robert Langewiesche, 1922)	<i>page</i> 3
2	A crucifix near Jachenau, in southern Bavaria. Photo: Harriett C. Wilson	5
3	The view toward Alexanderplatz in East Berlin. Photo by the author	7
4	Illustrations of Minnesinger from the fourteenth-century <i>Mannesse Manuscript</i> . Source: <i>Die Minnesinger in Bildern der Mannesischen Handschrift</i> (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1929)	21
5	The government of Augsburg is handed over to the guilds, 1368. Sketch from <i>Das Behaim Ehrenbuch der bürgerlichen und zunftlichen Regierung der hl. Reichsstadt Augsburg</i> (1545), reproduced in Ullstein's <i>Weltgeschichte</i> (Berlin: Ullstein, 1907-9)	23
6	The Marienburg. Source: <i>Die schöne Heimat</i>	25
7	A page from Eike von Repgow, <i>Sachsenspiegel</i> , including details of the granting of a castle as a fief. Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel	30
8	'Passional Christi und Anti-Christi', with woodcuts by Lukas Cranach the Elder. The Pope is identified with Anti-Christ. Reproduced from Ullstein's <i>Weltgeschichte</i>	41

- 9 'The Jewish Snipper and Money-Changer'. A broadsheet criticising the supposed avarice of the Jew at a time of rampant inflation (n.p., 1622). Flugschriftensammlung, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel 52
- 10 A very full depiction of means of exorcism and methods of dealing with a witch and her two helpers (Augsburg: Elias Wellhofer, 1654). Flugschriftensammlung, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel 54
- 11 The Battle of the White Mountain, 1620 (n.p.: 1620). Flugschriftensammlung, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel 57
- 12 War depicted as a beast ravaging Germany (n.p.: 1630/1648). Flugschriftensammlung, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel 63
- 13 A broadsheet illustrating the current craze for French fashions in the 'A-la-Mode-Kampf' of 1630 (Nuremberg? c. 1630). Flugschriftensammlung, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel 66
- 14 A depiction of 'travellers', people with no fixed livelihood in the disrupted society of mid-seventeenth-century Europe. Source: Ullstein's *Weltgeschichte* 67
- 15 The Diet of the Holy Roman Empire at Regensburg, 1653. Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel 70
- 16 The Würzburg Residence, designed by Balthasar Neumann, and mainly built in the period 1720–44. Source: Johannes Arndt, *Deutsche Kunst der Barockzeit* (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1941) 72
- 17 Recruitment of soldiers in the early eighteenth century. From H. J. von Fleming, *Der Vollkommene Teutsche Soldat* (Leipzig, 1726), reproduced in Ullstein's *Weltgeschichte* 78
- 18 Nuremberg in 1774. Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nuremberg, Kupferstichkabinett 82
- 19 The altar in the monastery of Benediktbeuern, southern Bavaria. Photo: Harriett C. Wilson 85

20	The battle of Jena, 1806. Source: Ullstein's <i>Weltgeschichte</i>	98
21	Prince Metternich in his study. Source: Karl Gutschow, <i>Unter dem schwarzen Bären</i> (E. Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1971)	106
22	The ceremonial opening of Munich University, 1826. Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich	108
23	A variety of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century occupations. Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nuremberg, Kupferstichkabinett	112
24	Barricades in Berlin, 1848. Source: Gutschow, <i>Unter dem schwarzen Bären</i>	118
25	Borsig's locomotive factory in Moabit, Berlin, 1855. Landesarchiv Berlin, Landesbildstelle	123
26	A selection of contemporary cartoons about Bismarck. Source: Ullstein's <i>Weltgeschichte</i>	136
27	A cartoon of working-class life by the Berlin artist Heinrich Zille	139
28	The latest in ladies' bicycling fashion, as illustrated in the popular middle-class magazine, <i>Die Gartenlaube</i> . Source: Karin Helm (ed.), <i>Rosinen aus der Gartenlaube</i> (Gütersloh: Signum Verlag, n.d.)	147
29	Barricades in Berlin, March 1919. Landesarchiv Berlin, Landesbildstelle	161
30	The Free Corps Werdenfels, in Munich to suppress revolutionary uprisings. Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich	161
31	The Kapp Putsch. Soldiers march into Berlin, March 1920. Landesarchiv Berlin, Landesbildstelle	163
32	A peasant wedding in Bad Tölz, Bavaria. Source: Deutschland Bild-Heft Nr. 117: 'Bad Tölz und das Land im Isar-Winkel' (Berlin-Tempelhof: Universum-Verlagsanstalt, c. 1933)	169
33	A 1932 election poster for Hindenburg. Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich	175

34	The Berlin rent strike of 1932. Landesarchiv Berlin, Landesbildstelle	177
35	Propaganda for Hitler celebrating the 'Day of Potsdam'. Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich	180
36	A delegation of the Nazi girls' organisation honours the Nazi heroes who fell in the 1923 putsch. Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich	184
37	The Austrian town of Lienz changes the name of one of its major squares to 'Adolf-Hitler-Platz'. Source: contemporary postcard in the possession of the author	191
38	The Jewish ghetto in Radom, Poland. Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich	199
39	Auschwitz-Birkenau casts a shadow over German history which cannot be erased. Photo by the author, 1988	203
40	The Berlin Wall starts to go up, August 1961. Landesarchiv Berlin, Landesbildstelle	216
41	People hack out mementoes from the now defunct Berlin Wall. Photo: Cornelia Usborne	246

MAPS

1	The division of the Frankish Kingdom at the Treaty of Verdun, 843	12
2	The German Empire, c. 1024–1125	17
3	Europe at the time of the Reformation	35
4	Germany after the Peace of Westphalia, 1648	61
5	The growth of Brandenburg-Prussia to 1786	80
6	The German Confederation in 1815. (After M. Hughes, <i>Nationalism and Society: Germany 1800–1945</i> (London: Edward Arnold, 1988))	102
7	Development of the Prussian–German Customs Union	115
8	The unification of Germany, 1867–71. (After Hughes, <i>Nationalism and Society</i>)	130

9	The Versailles settlement, 1919. (After M. Freeman, <i>Atlas of Nazi Germany</i> (London: Croom Helm, 1987))	162
10	Territorial annexations by Nazi Germany, 1935–9. (After Freeman, <i>Atlas of Nazi Germany</i>)	193
11	The partition of Poland in 1939. (After Freeman, <i>Atlas of Nazi Germany</i>)	195
12	Hitler's empire by autumn 1942. (After Freeman, <i>Atlas of Nazi Germany</i>)	196
13	Divided Germany after 1945. (After Hughes, <i>Nationalism and Society</i>)	206

PREFACE

A book such as this is infinitely easier to criticise than to write. The attempt to compress over a thousand years of highly complex history into a brief volume will inevitably provoke squeals of protest from countless specialists, who see their own particular patches distorted, constrained, misrepresented, even ignored. Yet a brief history of such a large topic can make no attempt at comprehensiveness. At best it can provide an intelligent guide to the broad sweep of developments.

These limitations are indeed partly inherent in the nature of historical writing, which cannot be a simple matter of recounting an agreed narrative, but rather must be a process of imposing an order on the mass of material – and on the interpretations of that material – which comes to us from the past. But it is particularly the case for a concise history of Germany that some brutal decisions about selection and omission have had to be made. While readers will all have their own views on the matter, the author has had to make particular choices. In terms of space devoted to different periods, the book operates on the landscape principle: things nearer to the observer loom larger, are perceived in closer detail, than the mistier general views of the distant horizons. Thus chapters generally deal with progressively shorter periods of time as the present is neared. Within the general landscape surveyed some features appear more important than others. The problem of ‘teleology’ is well known to historians: there is a tendency to notice particularly features pointing towards the present, explaining developments partly in terms of

their consequences (whether or not participants were aware of their 'contributions' to historical 'progress'), and to ignore turnings that led nowhere. While there has been a healthy reaction against this in recent historical writing, it is still the case that certain developments appear more important from the point of view of current concerns than do others. And all authors inevitably have their own particular interests, enthusiasms and blind spots, however hard they try to be balanced and objective in coverage. There is also the particular problem, in relation to the history of 'Germany', of the limits of what is held to be its proper subject matter. In this volume the history of Austria has had to be considered only insofar as it was an integral part of 'Germany' at different times, or interrelated with the history of modern Germany since 1871. Austria, while perhaps the most obvious, is not the only area to suffer in this way: the boundaries of 'Germany' have been extremely changeable over the centuries.

A wide-ranging work such as this must rely heavily on researches undertaken by others, and represent a synthesis of existing knowledge and often quite conflicting views, while yet developing a coherent overall account. The author is painfully aware of gaps and inadequacies in the present analysis, but hopes at least that in presenting a broad framework which spans the centuries two useful purposes will have been accomplished. This book may present a basis and stimulus for subsequent more detailed exploration of particular aspects; it may also serve to locate existing knowledge and interests of readers within a wider interpretive framework. The book is intended as a form of large-scale map which can be used as a context for finer investigation of details along the way.

I am tremendously grateful to my colleagues and friends who have read and made valuable comments on parts of the manuscript, saving me from factual errors and inappropriate interpretations. I would like in particular to thank the following for their painstaking efforts to improve the text: David Blackbourn; Ian Kershaw; Timothy McFarland; Rudolf Muhs; Hamish Scott; Bob Scribner; Jill Stephenson; Martin Swales. Obviously, I alone am responsible for the inadequacies which remain. The work benefited from a small grant from the UCL Dean's Fund enabling me to spend some time combing libraries, museums and archives for suitable illustrative

material. The choice of appropriate illustrations was almost as difficult as the construction of the text, and raised as many problems of selection, interpretation and omission. Discerning readers will notice that illustrations of personalities and familiar sights have generally been demoted in favour of representation of broader themes and more remote periods or places. Finally, I would also like to thank my husband and my three children for being willing to spend innumerable summers wandering around central Europe in search of aspects of the German past.

PREFACE TO THE UPDATED EDITION (1992)

First of all, I would like to thank Dr Werner Schochow of Berlin for pointing out to me some errors of detail which crept unnoticed into the first edition, and for suggesting certain amendments to the index. I am extremely grateful to him for his close and careful reading of the text, and the trouble he took in providing detailed comments and suggestions.

I have also taken the opportunity to put discussion of West Germany into the past tense (East Germany having already suffered that fate at the time of the first edition). While much of what was 'West Germany' has of course passed over into the enlarged Federal Republic after unification in 1990, nevertheless united Germany is a new entity, and it would be prejudging its development in a quite a-historical fashion to suggest that what was true of the pre-1990 Federal Republic will continue to obtain in the new, rather lop-sided united Federal Republic, which faces both new domestic challenges and a changed European context.

Mary Fulbrook
London, October 1991

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION (2004)

For the Second Edition, I have made a number of minor changes throughout the text, to reflect the changing viewpoints of the present, and the implications of recent scholarship. A new chapter

has been added on Germany since 1990. The bibliography has been drastically pruned and substantially updated. But I have chosen not to tinker dramatically with the main body of the book, which has now proved its usefulness as an accessible overview for a wide range of readers across the English-speaking world and in a number of foreign translations.

Mary Fulbrook
London, March 2003

I

Introduction: the German lands and people

In a famous and much-quoted verse, those two most renowned German writers, Goethe and Schiller, posed the question which has been at the heart of much German history: ‘Deutschland? aber wo liegt es? Ich weiss das Land nicht zu finden.’ (‘Germany? But where is it? I know not how to find the country.’) They went on to put their finger succinctly on a further problem of the Germans: ‘Zur *Nation* euch zu bilden, ihr hoffet es, Deutsche, vergebens; / Bildet, ihr könnt es, dafür freier zu Menschen euch aus.’ (‘Any hope of forming yourselves into a *nation*, Germans, is in vain; develop yourselves rather – you can do it – more freely as human beings!’) Between them, these quotations encapsulate perhaps the most widespread general notions about Germany and the Germans – although of course Goethe and Schiller could hardly foresee, let alone be held responsible for, what was to come. A belated nation, which became unified too late, and a nation, at that, of ‘thinkers and poets’ who separated the freedom of the sphere of the spirit from the public sphere and the powers of the state; a nation which, notoriously, eventually gave rise – whatever its contributions in literature and music – to the epitome of evil in the genocidal rule of Adolf Hitler. A nation with an arguably uniquely creative culture and uniquely destructive political history; a nation uniquely problematic, tormented, peculiar, with its own strange, distorted pattern of history. And a nation uniquely efficient, in every transformation becoming a ‘model’ of its kind.

As with all platitudes, there is some element of truth in these generalisations; and as with all generalisations, there is much which is

oversimplified, misleading, and downright wrong. Perhaps the most misleading aspect of all these statements is the underlying assumption that there is some simple entity, the 'Germans', who have an enduring national identity revealing itself over the ages in all the twists and turns of a tortuous national history. The realities are infinitely more complex. There is a geographical complexity, with a range of peoples speaking variants of the German language across a central European area, in which over the centuries there has been a great diversity of political forms, which have for most of 'Germany's' history included also non-German-speaking peoples. There is a historical complexity, with as much contingency and accident as pre-determined drive along any evolutionary path to a pre-ordained end. And there is the complexity inherent in the nature of reconstructing and writing a history of a shifting entity, itself constituted in the light of current concerns and interest. For many people, recent times will appear infinitely the most interesting; remoter periods will remain – for all but the few, fascinated by a far-removed culture – by way of a 'background', a setting of the scene, to know what the situation was 'when the story began'. Even a decision about the latter, the starting point, is to some extent arbitrary. All reconstructed history is a human construction from the perspective of certain interests, conscious or otherwise.

For most English-speaking people until 1989, 'Germany' would have meant the Federal Republic of Germany, or West Germany, with its capital in Bonn. To others, the German Democratic Republic, or East Germany, would be included, created as it was out of the ruins of defeated Nazi Germany. Most people today would not even think of Austria, let alone Switzerland, as candidates for being included in 'Germany'; yet it was only in 1871 that Austria was excluded from the unified 'small Germany', under Prussian domination, of Imperial Germany. German-speaking Switzerland separated, even from the 'Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation', many centuries earlier. And, of course, there are other areas in central Europe which were either previously included in some German states – as, for example, those former German territories now in Poland and Russia – or where there were or are substantial German-speaking minorities under other governments. For some historians, Germany's politically and geographically insecure and contested central European location – *mitten in Europa* – has indeed been



Plate 1. Kloster Grüssau in Silesia. Since 1945 part of Poland, Silesia was a province of Habsburg Austria until it was seized by Prussia in 1740–42. Central European boundaries have been very fluctuating over the centuries.

elevated to a central interpretive factor in ‘German’ history and identity. It certainly makes a clear definition of the subject of study more complex than is the case for many ‘national’ histories. While the ultimate landing stage of this book will be the united Germany formed in 1990 from the two Germanies of the late twentieth century – the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany – much else will need to be considered along the way, with a flexibility of focus and boundary.

The areas covered by Germany in the twenty-first century include many striking regional variations, based partly in topography and geography, partly in historical differences. Topographically, the German lands stretch from the sandy coasts of the North Sea and Baltic Sea, with their trading ports, through the heathy North German plain; then, broken by the hillier country of the Central German Uplands (as in the Harz mountains, or the Erzgebirge), down through the gentle undulations of southern Germany to the foothills of the Alps on the borders with Austria and Switzerland. The climate varies from the mild, wet Atlantic climate of the north and west to a drier, more continental climate, with cold, snowy winters and hot summers punctuated by frequent thunderstorms, in

the south and east. Natural resources are variable: there are considerable deposits of the inferior lignite (brown coal) in eastern Germany, which produces about a third of the world's total production, whereas in western Germany bituminous coal is mined in greater quantities, particularly in the Ruhr area. Germany has small amounts of natural gas and oil, insufficient for current energy needs, and is reliant also on controversial nuclear power production. There are variable, but not extensive, mineral deposits (iron ore, lead, zinc, potash salts). Soils and farming conditions vary: in many areas, the land is left as heath or forest rather than being put to grain production or pasture. In the 1980s, the population of West Germany was slightly over 61 million, while that of East Germany was somewhat under 17 million; in 1990, the population of united Germany was 78.3 million.

Historically, formed as they are of regions which had their own existence as independent provinces or principalities in the past, the German lands show striking regional variations based more in political, cultural and socioeconomic history than in geography. What will strike the visitor to Germany are the results of human occupation, human use of the environment, human beliefs, practices and social relationships: mediaeval walled towns and castles, great baroque churches and monasteries, princely palaces, different styles of farm house, burgher house, or industrial slum. Regional stereotypes abound: Prussian Protestant asceticism, militarism and conservatism is often contrasted with Hamburg liberalism or with the more expansive mode of the Catholic, beer-swilling, unintelligible Bavarians. There is a great variety of regional accents and cultures still to be found in the more cosmopolitan and centralised Germany of the late twentieth century. Even those with only a casual acquaintance will be aware of differences between the Rhineland, with its castles and vineyards, the industrial Ruhr (no longer belching the smoke and fumes it used to do before the shift to high-tech industries in south-western Germany), the forests, streams and cuckoo-clock attractions of the Black Forest, or the lakes and Alpine pastures of Upper Bavaria. Fewer casual tourists will be familiar with the northern coasts, the Frisian islands or the lakes and waters of Schleswig-Holstein, although they may have visited Bremen, Hamburg and Lübeck; most will have sped through the rolling Westphalian hills



Plate 2. A crucifix near Jachenau, in southern Bavaria. With its carved wooden 'curtains', this is a particularly splendid example of Catholic popular piety. In some predominantly Protestant areas of Germany, such as Württemberg, small patches of territory rich in crucifixes testify to a long-distant past when they might have been, for example, fiefs of the Catholic Austrian Habsburgs.

on a fast autobahn, bypassing the Lüneberg heath to the north or the mediaeval attractions tucked away in the Harz mountains; very few will have explored the forgotten communities in the Bohemian border country and the Bavarian forest on the Czech border, or be aware of quite local differences between such regions as the Spessart, the Kraichgau or the Odenwald. Many will know the major urban centres, particularly cities such as Munich, Nuremberg, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Cologne, but will have little idea about the reasons for the decentralised nature of pre-1990 West German urban life (with its capital, Bonn, so easily dismissed as ‘a small town in Germany’); before the revolutionary events of autumn 1989, very few western visitors would have penetrated further into East Germany than a day trip to its capital, East Berlin. Eastern Germany, although smaller than the western areas of Germany, evinces a comparable regional variation: from the sand dunes of the Baltic coast in the north, through the sparsely populated lake country of Mecklenburg, down to the varied regions of the hillier southern areas, including industrial centres such as Halle, Leipzig, Erfurt and Chemnitz, major cultural centres such as Dresden and Weimar, and tourist attractions in Saxon Switzerland, the Thuringian forest, or the Harz mountains. All these regions differ for a multitude of reasons beyond purely topographical factors such as proximity to rivers, sea or mountains. Economically, they have been developed and exploited in different ways and become involved as different elements in wider economic systems. Culturally, the differences between Catholic and Protestant areas in the confessionalised states of post-Reformation Germany endured and had a profound impact over the centuries. Politically, the histories of the different regions experienced a myriad of forms, a veritable laboratory for the historically oriented political scientist. All these varied influences have left their imprint on the more homogenised industrial Germany of today.

For most visitors before 1989, it would have been almost impossible to imagine away what was perhaps the most striking feature of the two Germanies: the fiercely guarded frontier running down between the Germanies from the Baltic to the Czech border with southern Germany, dividing not only East and West Germany but also East and West Europe, communism and capitalism, democratic centralism and liberal democracy, symbolising the international rifts of the second half of the twentieth century – in Churchill’s phrase,



Plate 3. The view towards Alexanderplatz in East Berlin in the 1980s. At the end, the television tower dwarfs the Marienkirche; on the left, the rebuilt Cathedral faced the new East German 'Palace of the Republic', built on the site of the former Royal Palace, on the right.

the 'Iron Curtain'. This border not only snaked down along miles of frontier between the two Germanies, with a no-man's land dividing formerly close communities, cutting them off from natural hinterlands; it also cut right through the very heart of that former magnificent metropolitan centre, the erstwhile capital of Prussia and of Imperial, Weimar and Nazi Germany, and now again of Germany since 1990: Berlin. Heavily armed guards monitored the highly restricted flow of traffic at the limited crossing points and ensured that no East German citizen left without permission. West Berlin, economically dependent and highly subsidised by the West German government, was also a city of self-advertising capitalism: vast department stores, bright lights, extravagant cultural performances, international conference centres, patronage of the arts. The old, turn-of-the-century slums, built as the Imperial capital rapidly expanded, by the 1980s housed not only the still surviving working-class Berliners, but also a large number of foreign 'guest workers' as well as a range of groups cultivating 'alternative' life styles in a variety of ways. In amongst all this, there was the inevitable pervasion

of military presence – Berlin was still formally a city under four-power control – and even when escaping to the remarkable natural resources of the lakes and forests in West Berlin, there was the omnipresence of the Wall. Only a few yards away, across the Wall, there was a very different Berlin: ‘Berlin, capital of the GDR’, as was so proudly proclaimed on every signpost. Less empty of traffic than in earlier decades, East Berlin covered the heart of the old Imperial capital: new East German public buildings, as well as mass-produced apartment blocks, jostled with the crumbling splendours of the old political and cultural centres. Whatever the East German attempts to promote a comparably – but differently – attractive image to that of the west, in areas such as the modern Alexanderplatz, much of East Berlin had a drab, dusty, old-fashioned air. The two Berlins, in extreme forms, epitomised and symbolised many of the strengths and weaknesses of the two socioeconomic and political systems for which they served as representatives.

And, in a dramatic fashion, the opening of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 symbolised the passing of an era. With the revolutionary changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, the ‘Iron Curtain’ began to crumble. As communist rule collapsed in the East, economic and political pressures combined to produce the unexpectedly rapid, unprecedented unification of two very different systems and societies in October 1990. For observers of the new, united Germany of the early twenty-first century, history takes on a new significance, as once again – as so many times over the centuries – the issue of Germany’s character, form, and role in Europe and the world gains prominence. Yet with the end of the Cold War the character of world alignments and tensions changed too. With international terrorism and new conflicts, the ‘German problem’ came to be seen in a very different light.

So much for initial appearances and observations. There is much more to German history, society, culture and political life than can be gained from travelling impressions. There are, too, many aspects of the German past which have been neglected, repressed, transformed, or simply ignored. We must now begin to explore the broad outlines of the twists and turns of German history which have led to the Germany we see today.

Mediaeval Germany

THE BEGINNINGS OF GERMAN HISTORY

The area now known as Germany shows evidence of settlement since prehistoric times: Neanderthal man is a well-known archaeological find, and there are traces of stone, bronze and iron-age settlements right across central Europe. The Roman Empire extended across the western and southern parts of what is now known as Germany, and there are Roman foundations and remains in many German towns, such as Trier, Augsburg, Mainz, Cologne, Regensburg and Passau. A frontier fortification (essentially a ditch and bank) known as the *limes* can still be seen between the rivers Main and Danube. The Roman Empire had considerable impact on those parts which it occupied. Beyond it lay what the Romans called 'barbarians' (meaning foreigners). The Roman author Tacitus (c. AD 55–116) gives us an intriguing, if not entirely reliable, glimpse of the Germanic tribes in his *Germania*. He describes their social and political organisation, their modes of warfare, concepts of crime and punishment, styles of housing, dress and hairstyle, their marriage practices, funerals, agricultural techniques, and habits of drinking, banqueting, quarrelling and sloth. Apart from praise for the chastity of German women, Tacitus' description of Germany and the Germans is not entirely flattering: the Germans must be a native people, not immigrants from elsewhere, for 'who would . . . [want] to visit Germany, with its unlovely scenery, its bitter climate, its general dreariness to sense and eye, unless it were his home?' There are

more qualified descriptions of differences among the individual Germanic tribes, ranging from the Swabians with their intricate hair-dos, through the relatively civilised Hermunduri who traded with the Romans, to the far-flung Fenni (living in what became Lithuania) who are characterised as 'astonishingly wild and horribly poor. They eat grass, dress in skins, and sleep on the ground.'

By the beginning of the fifth century AD the Roman Empire was in crisis. While the causes of its collapse are various, the fall of the western part was precipitated by the invasions of barbarian tribes – Visigoths, Vandals and Huns (whose names have become enduring concepts) – across already weakening and overstretched frontiers. Those Germans who settled on Roman land tended to abandon tribal gods and convert to Christianity. In the sixth and seventh centuries, a new Romanised form of Germanic society emerged in the west.

The first settled Germanic communities were under the Franks: Clovis defeated the last Roman governor in Gaul in 486, and established the Merovingian monarchy. This Frankish empire united certain Germanic tribes, and eventually included the so-called Alemanni, Saxons and Bavarians. It was ruled by a certain partnership – replete with tensions – between king, nobility and church. From the sixth century onwards, monasteries were founded, and churches built in the countryside, frequently founded by and dependent on the nobility. The majority of the population lived in a servile status on the land, although there were distinctions between free peasants and serfs, as well as differences between manorial estates in the west and the farms in areas which had not been under Roman occupation. In 751 the Merovingians were deposed and the Carolingian king Pepin elected; he was also anointed by Frankish bishops, to lend religious legitimacy in place of royal blood, thus inaugurating the tradition of kingship as an office conferred by God, although under his successors this continued to be associated with heathen notions of blood-right. While at the beginning of the Merovingian period the total land under cultivation in what was to become Germany had been perhaps 2 per cent, with the rest left as thick forests or swampy marshes, the Carolingian period saw some increase in population, with the clearing of forests to establish new villages.