

# The past as propaganda: totalitarian archaeology in Nazi Germany

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*An important element to the future of archaeology in the ex-Communist countries of central Europe will be the freeing of archaeological ideas from the constraints of a particular set of social theories built into the fabric of the state, as Milisauskas noted in the last ANTIQUITY (64: 283–5). This is a timely moment to look at the interference of a different set of social theories in the same region some decades ago.*

After almost six decades, there is no comprehensive account by a German-speaking prehistorian of the effects on prehistoric scholarship of the National Socialist regime, or the rôle played by archaeology in legitimating it. This paper addresses the following questions: What were the foundations of German prehistoric research under the National Socialists (NS)? What rôle did prehistory play in the process of political legitimation from 1933 to 1945? What did the NS system offer to prehistorians in exchange for their part in this legitimation process? What was the official Party policy regarding prehistoric archaeology? What was the response of the discipline to this Faustian bargain? What were the effects of state control on excavation and research? How is German prehistoric archaeology affected by this legacy today?

## **The foundations of the 'pre-eminently national discipline'**

To understand events in German prehistoric archaeology under the National Socialists, it is necessary to look at the discipline well before Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and the beginning of the *Umbruch* period of radical change. Archaeology in Central Europe at the eve of the First World War was marked by a return of the ethnohistoric approach to theory; in German-speaking regions there was a new name for the discipline to go with its new orientation. The

term *Vorgeschichte* (prehistory) was rejected as a survival of anthropological thinking; *Urgeschichte* (early history) was preferred as better emphasizing the continuity of prehistory with documentary history (Sklenar 1983: 132). The writings of the 19th-century French racial philosopher Gobineau provided a doctrine of the inequality of different races (Daniel & Renfrew 1988: 104–6). Journals and publications dealing with the subject of race and genetic engineering increasingly appeared in Germany in the early 20th century, among them *Volk und Rasse*, which was founded in 1926, and *Fortschritte der Erbpathologie und Rassenhygiene*, founded in 1929. Neither publication survived the Second World War.

The groundwork for an ethnocentric German prehistory was laid by Gustaf Kossinna (1858–1932), a linguist who was a late convert to prehistory (FIGURE 1). Kossinna proposed cultural diffusion as a process whereby influences, ideas and models were passed on by more advanced peoples to the less advanced with which they came into contact. This concept, wedded to Kossinna's *Kulturkreis* theory, the identification of geographical regions with specific ethnic groups on the basis of material culture, lent theoretical support to the expansionist policies of Nazi Germany. 'Distribution maps of archaeological types became a convincing argument for expansionist aims: wherever a single find of a type designated as Germanic was

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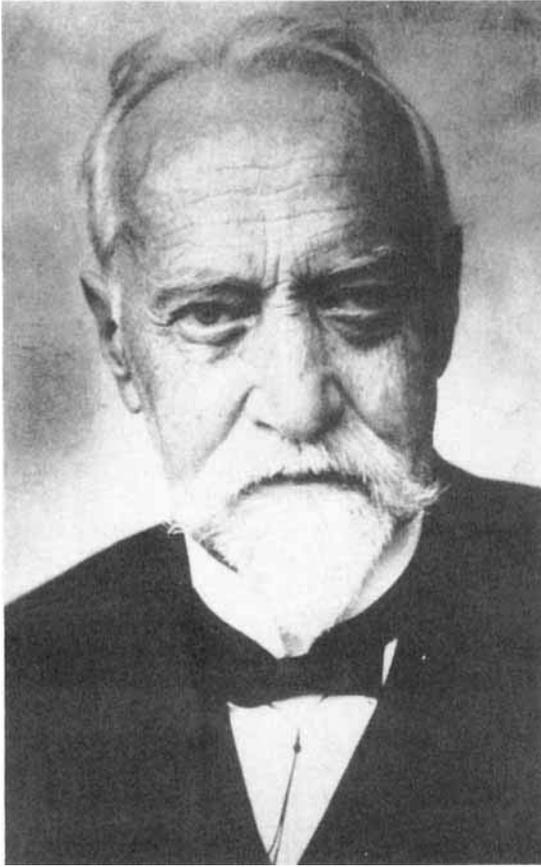


FIGURE 1. Gustav Kossinna (Mannus 1931: 337).

found, the land was declared ancient German territory . . .' (Sklenar 1983: 151) (FIGURE 2).

Alfred Rosenberg, the Party's ideologist, codified this ethnocentric and xenophobic perspective: 'An individual to whom the tradition of his people (*Volkstum*) and the honor of his people (*Volksehre*) is not a supreme value, has forfeited the right to be protected by that people' (*Germanenerbe* 1938: 105). Applied to prehistoric archaeology, this perspective resulted in the neglect or distortion of data which did not directly apply to Germanic peoples; during the 1930s scholars whose main interests were provincial Roman archaeology were labeled *Römlinge* by the extremists and considered anti-German (Jacob-Friesen 1950: 4). The *Römisch Germanische Kommission* in Mainz, founded in 1907 by Schuchhardt and his circle (Eggers 1986: 220), was the object of defamatory attacks, first by Kossinna and later by Rosenberg

and his organization, primarily because it concentrated on the excavation and study of provincial Roman Germany (Bollmus 1970; Eggers 1986: 234).

The connection between prehistory and politics was of long standing, not a new product of the National Socialist regime. The fledgling discipline evolved from the pan-European geographic divisions and rise of nationalism that followed the First World War (Sklenar 1983: 131). Politicians began to take an interest in prehistoric archaeology, which seemed well suited to nationalist visions. Hindenburg's interest in Kossinna's work is well documented (*Mannus-Bibliothek* 1928: Frontispiece). Kaiser Wilhelm II was a frequent visitor to Schuchhardt's excavations at the *Römerschanze* near Potsdam; after one visit, he sent Schuchhardt a telegram: 'Continue excavations and ascertain whether [*Römerschanze*] still *Volksburg* or already *Fürstensitz*' (Eggers 1986: 224). Between 1905 and 1914 the Kaiser also helped finance a number of archaeological excavations undertaken by the Duchess of Mecklenburg, in what is now the Yugoslav Republic of Slovenia, and at Hallstatt in Austria. The skull of a well-preserved skeleton from Hallstatt was sent to the Kaiser by the Duchess as a gift (Wells 1981: 1, 16).

### Prehistory as political legitimation

Prehistory played an important rôle in rehabilitating German self-respect after the humiliation of defeat in 1918, the perceived insult of Versailles, and the imposed Weimar regime. The dedication of the 1921 edition of Gustav Kossinna's seminal *German prehistory: a preeminently national discipline* reads: 'To the German people, as a building block in the reconstruction of the externally as well as internally disintegrated fatherland' (1921: Dedication).

Kossinna acquired great influence after the death of Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902), who was the most prominent German prehistorian of the late 19th century. Virchow was one of the first proponents of the ethnohistoric approach to prehistory, although he is perhaps remembered more for his misinterpretation of the first Neanderthal skeletal remains in 1856 (Eggers 1986: 202–5). In 1909 Kossinna founded the German Society for Prehistory in Berlin, later more aptly named the Society for German Prehistory (*Gesellschaft für Deutsche Vorgeschichte*). This

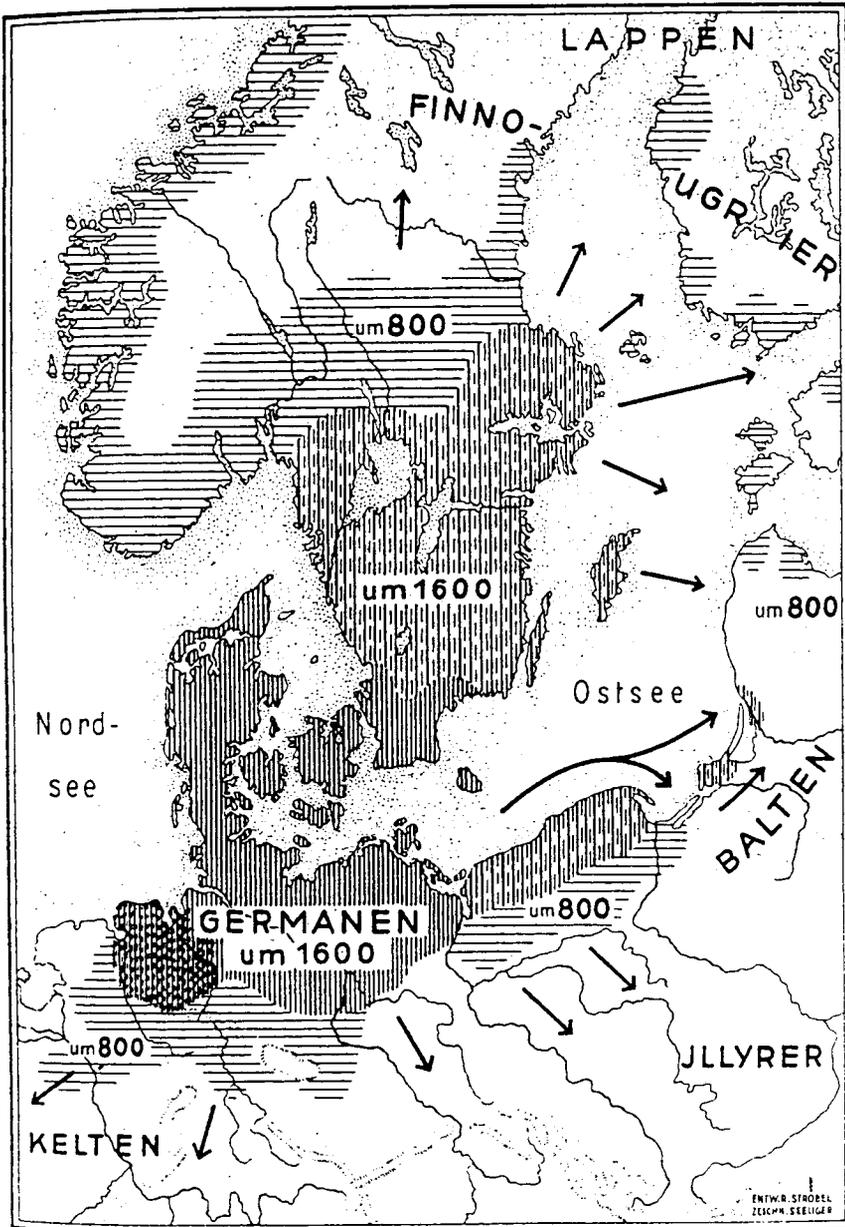


FIGURE 2. A distribution map of 'Germanic' territory during the Bronze Age (Reinerth 1945: figure 2).

was much more than a semantic alteration; as Alfred Götze wrote (1933:68):

The name of an organization is its business card . . . In order to understand correctly what the Society for German Prehistory means one must remember what it was originally called . . . [It means] a prehistory of Germanness, independent of its present-day political or ethnic boundaries, reaching back to its roots and following these wherever the ancestors of the Ger-

mans originated in antiquity – and that was on occasion all of Europe.

Kossinna's influence increased interest in archaeology as a political tool; as the path which German National Socialism was to follow became more clearly defined, archaeological data were used to endorse it. Gradual changes manifested themselves in new journal titles and cover illustrations. The publication

series *Mannus-Bibliothek*, for example, changed its title from the latinized original to the Germanic *Mannus-Bücherei* (it was named *Mannus-Bibliothek* again after the war). *Mannus Zeitschrift für Vorgeschichte* became *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Vorgeschichte* in 1934; by 1975 it was *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Vor- und Frühgeschichte*. The editorial staff of these and other journals turned over rapidly between 1933 and 1935, as dissenting archaeologists were replaced by 'right-thinking' party liners. The Berlin-based *Prähistorische Zeitschrift* was one of the few journals relatively unaffected in form and content by the political transformations of the 1930s.

Many prehistoric archaeologists were drawn to the National Socialists because they felt themselves second-class citizens in the academic arena with regard to the classical and Near Eastern archaeologists; they were generally bitter about their lack of state funding and public recognition. The Party benefited from a dual inferiority complex on the part of its constituency of prehistorians, feeling both the general sense of injustice provoked by the Treaty of Versailles and a particular perception of prehistory as a neglected academic discipline. On the creation of the new Polish state in 1919, Kossinna published an article, 'The German *Ostmark*, home territory of the *Germanen*' (1919), which used archaeological evidence to support Germany's claim to the area. He sent the article to Versailles in an attempt to apply his ethnic interpretation of archaeological evidence directly to the politics of the day. He never received a reply (Eggers 1986: 236). Kossinna's identification of 'Germanic' material culture in Polish territory led to a debate with Josef Kostrzewski, one of his former students, who was rather predictably convinced that the ethnic group described by Kossinna was in fact Slavic. As Veit points out, Kostrzewski's criticism was directed not at Kossinna's *method*, but at his results (1989: 40).

This defensively ethnocentric attitude manifested itself in the intentional exaggeration of the importance of Germanic cultural influences in Western civilization (Sklenar 1983: 145). Hitler contributed his own views on this subject in a dinner-table monologue, referring to the Greeks as Germans who had survived a northern natural catastrophe and evolved a highly developed culture in southern contexts

(Picker 1976: 93). This common piece of wishful thinking was supported by some otherwise reputable archaeologists. The Research Report of the Reichsbund for German Prehistory, July to December 1941, for example, reported the nine-week expedition of the archaeologist Hans Reinert and a few colleagues to Greece where they claimed to have discovered major new evidence of Indogermanic migration to Greece during the Neolithic (*Mannus Zeitschrift für Deutsche Vorgeschichte* 1942 33: 599).

### **The Faustian bargain: state support under the NS regime**

The nature of prehistoric archaeology itself in its European context is crucial to understanding its rôle in Nazi Germany. Peter Goessler stated unequivocally, 'prehistory is an historic discipline, not a natural science . . . and it serves historic goals even if its sources are generally quite different ones' (1950: 7). The same point is made by Eggers: 'There is only one history, and prehistory is part of it in its entirety. These two types of scholarship differ only in their different sources: on the one hand written texts, on the other material culture' (1986: 16).

Prehistoric archaeology in Nazi Germany differed from history as a discipline in one important respect. It was not a recognized and well-funded academic subject before the rise of National Socialism. The first chair in prehistory was established in Marburg in 1928 (Sklenar 1983: 160). The subject was taught by lecturers whose university status was unquestionably lower than that of classical and Near Eastern archaeologists or art historians. Alfred Götze (1933: 69–72) blamed this phenomenon on the

obsession, unfortunately embedded in the blood of every German, to value the foreign more highly than the indigenous, an evil characteristic which affects archaeology as well as other disciplines . . . It also manifests itself however in the unequal treatment by the authorities and other controlling official organizations. One need only compare the financial support which is allocated to the German archaeological projects inside and outside Germany . . . Without bureaucratic support worth mentioning, without the financial means at the disposal of other disciplines, German prehistory has grown from hand to mouth, attacked and ridiculed to boot by its older sister disciplines. These are hard words, but I know whereof I speak, for I witnessed these developments in my student days.

And Hans Reinerth explained in the introduction to his *Federsee Moor* volume (1936a: 5):

We have found the courage once more to admit to the deeds of our ancestors. Their honor is our honor! The millennia separate us no longer. The eternal stream of blood binds us across the ages to those Nordic farmer's sons, who had to fight for southern German soil twice in the course of four millennia.

Eggers, writing four decades after the war, believes this inferiority complex was more perceived than real; it was exploited by scholars like Kossinna who projected their personal professional disappointments on to the discipline (1986: 231). I think the truth lies somewhere in between; the interest shown in some excavations by high government officials and members of the nobility before 1933, which Eggers cites to support his case, did not compensate for the general lack of funds, the inadequate museum space and the paucity of academic positions. Reinerth's description of 'ideologically correct' prehistorians as engaged in a 'battle against the barbaric lie of the uncultured character of our Germanic forebears' (*Mannus Zeitschrift für Deutsche Vorgeschichte* 1940: Dedication to Alfred Götze) was an exaggeration which contained a grain of truth (Sklenar 1983: 160; Veit 1989: 37).

Prehistoric archaeologists seemed, in 1933, to have everything to gain by an association with the rising Nazi party. Between 1933, the year of Hitler's accession to power, and 1935, eight new chairs were created in German prehistory, and funding became available for prehistoric excavations across Germany and Eastern Europe on an unprecedented scale (Reinerth 1936b: 66; Sklenar 1983: 160). New institutes sprang up – the Institute for Prehistory in Bonn in 1938 (*Nachrichtenblatt für Deutsche Vorzeit* 1938), and the Institut für Pre- and Early History in Cologne in 1939 (von Stokar 1939: 269ff). Museums for protohistory were established, such as the one in Freiburg (*Nachrichtenblatt für Deutsche Vorzeit* 1938). Prehistoric collections were brought out of storage and given exhibition space, in many cases for the first time. Institutes for Rune Research were founded at the Universities of Göttingen and Giessen (*Nachrichtenblatt für Deutsche Vorzeit* 1939: 73). The Römisch Germanisches Zentral Museum in Mainz became the Zentral Museum

für Deutsche Vor- und Frühgeschichte in 1939 (Behrens 1939: 266–9). (Today it has its pre-war title once more).

Open-air museums like the reconstructed Neolithic and Bronze Age lake settlement at Unteruhldingen on Lake Constanz popularized prehistory. An archaeological film series, produced and directed by the prehistorian Lothar Zotz, included titles like 'Threatened by the steam plow', 'Germany's Bronze Age', 'The flames of prehistory' and 'On the trail of the eastern Germans' (Zotz 1933: 50). Popular journals, such as *Die Kunde* and *Germanenerbe* – a publication of the Ahnenerbe organization under the official direction of Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler – proliferated.

These journals contained abundant visual material. One advertisement shows the reconstruction of a Neolithic drum from a pile of meaningless sherds. The text exhorts readers to 'keep your eyes open, for every Volksgenosse [fellow German] can contribute to this important national project! Do not assume that a ceramic vessel is useless because it falls apart during excavation. Carefully preserve even the smallest fragment!' An underlined sentence emphasizes the principal message: 'Every single find is important because it represents a document of our ancestors!' (*Nachrichtenblatt für Deutsche Vorzeit* 1939: figure 48).

Members of amateur organizations were actively recruited by appeal to patriotism. The membership flyer for the official national Confederation for German Prehistory (*Reichsbund für Deutsche Vorgeschichte*), under the direction of Hans Reinerth of the Amt Rosenberg, proclaimed: 'Responsibility with respect to our indigenous prehistory must again fill every German with pride!' The organization stated its goals as 'the interpretation and dissemination of unfalsified knowledge regarding the history and cultural achievements of our northern Germanic ancestors on German and foreign soil' (*Mannus Zeitschrift für Deutsche Vorgeschichte* 1938: flyleaf).

### **The official policy regarding prehistoric archaeology**

What was the official Party policy towards prehistoric archaeology? Different bureaucratic divisions within the NS organization produced their own policies, at times in conflict with one another. The power struggle between the Amt

Rosenberg and Himmler's Ahnenerbe organization from 1933 to 1937 (Bollmus 1970) exemplifies this internal confusion.

The Ahnenerbe organization was founded in 1935 as the Research and Teaching Society 'Ancestral Heritage', (*Forschungs- und Lehrgemeinschaft Ahnenerbe (Ahnenerbe-Stiftung)*); after 1936 it included the Society for the Advancement and Preservation of German Cultural Monuments (*Die Gesellschaft zur Förderung und Pflege Deutscher Kulturdenkmäler*). The Ahnenerbe organization, a personal project of Himmler's, was funded by interested German individuals and firms to research, excavate and restore real and imagined Germanic cultural relics (Koehl 1983; Kater 1974). The rôles played both by the Ahnenerbe and by the Amt Rosenberg in archaeological research, the conflict between Rosenberg and Himmler with regard to a central state-controlled archaeological organization, are discussed in detail by Bollmus (1970: 153–235). The absence of a unified central party policy with regard to prehistoric research is typical of the bureaucratic chaos which characterized the command system of the National Socialists. To some extent prehistorians benefited from this internecine strife. It effectively sabotaged plans for an umbrella organization, the Confederation for German Prehistory (*Reichsbund für Deutsche Vorgeschichte*), intended to coordinate and control all prehistoric research in German territory under the direction of Rosenberg's operative Hans Reinerth.

At the top of the command pyramid the response was equally contradictory. Party ideologues Alfred Rosenberg and Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler were ridiculed by Hitler and his inner circle as 'crack pot otherworld apostles' who formulated 'homemade Germanic myths' (Picker 1976: 44). According to Hitler's architect and armaments minister Albert Speer, Rosenberg's best-selling 700-page *Myth of the Twentieth Century* – which, among other contortions, 'proved' the existence of Atlantis and that Christ was not a Jew – was 'considered by the public to be the standard text for party ideology, but Hitler in his teatime conversations bluntly called it "stuff nobody can understand" written by "a narrow-minded Baltic German who thinks in horribly complicated terms". He expressed wonderment that

such a book could ever have attained such sales' (1970: 96). Hitler attacked Himmler as well (Speer 1970: 94–5), saying

Why do we call the whole world's attention to the fact that we have no past? It's bad enough that the Romans were erecting great buildings when our forefathers were still living in mud huts; now Himmler is starting to dig up these villages of mud huts and enthusing over every potsherd and stone axe he finds. All we prove by that is that we were still throwing stone hatchets and crouching around open fires when Greece and Rome had already reached the highest stage of culture. We really should do our best to keep quiet about this past. Instead Himmler makes a great fuss about it all. The present-day Romans must be having a laugh at these revelations.

Beyond its convenience for propaganda purposes and as justification of the expansion into countries like Czechoslovakia and Poland, the archaeological activities of the Amt Rosenberg and Himmler's Ahnenerbe were just so much window dressing for the the upper echelons of the Party. There was no real respect for the past or its remains; while Party prehistorians like Reinerth distorted the facts, the SS destroyed archaeological sites like Biskupin in Poland (Sklenar 1983: 62).

'Official' involvement in archaeology consisted of visits by Himmler and corps of SS officers to SS-funded and staffed excavations, like the one on the Erdenburg in the Rhineland (Buttler & Schleif 1939), or press shots of Hitler and Goebbels viewing a reconstructed 'Germanic' Late Bronze Age burial in its tree trunk coffin, part of the 1934 *'Deutsches Volk–Deutsche Arbeit'* exhibition in Berlin (Petersen 1934). Party appropriation of prehistoric data was evident in the use of Indo-European and Germanic design symbols in NS uniforms and regalia. The double lightning bolt, symbol of Himmler's SS organization, was adapted from a Germanic rune (Kohlmann 1942: 99–108). The swastika is an Indo-European sun symbol which appears in ceramic designs as early as the Neolithic in western Europe and continues well into early medieval times (FIGURE 3; *Die Kunde* 1936: Title page; *Germanenerbe* 1938: Title page).

### The response of the discipline to NS control

German prehistorians of the 1930s can be regarded as falling into three basic categories:

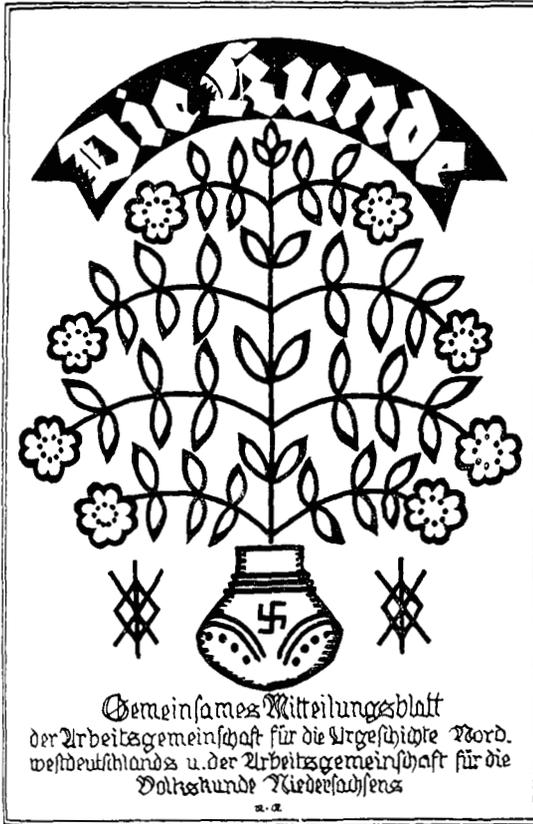


FIGURE 3. Title page of the journal *Die Kunde* (1936).

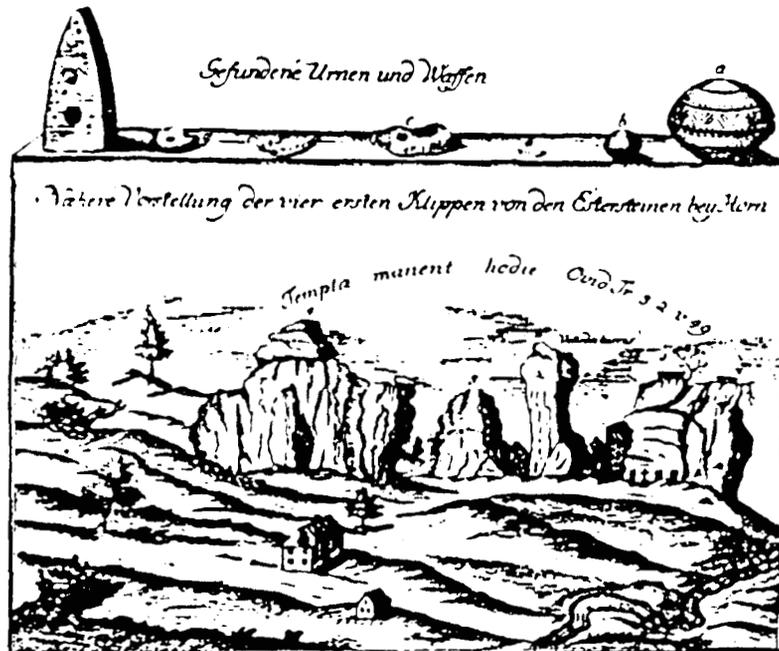


FIGURE 4. Etching of Externsteine near Horn, Kreis Lippe from 1748 (Teudt 1934: figure 17).

the party-liners; the acquiescent and passive majority; and the critical opposition.

#### The party-liners

The party-liners either achieved academic legitimacy under the Nazis, or were already established scholars promoted within the Party, who furthered their careers by conducting 'politically correct' research. The lunatic fringe of this category were derisively called *Germanomanen* (Jacob-Friesen 1934: 131) or *Germanomaniacs* by the mainstream. Herman Wirth, co-founder of the *Ahnenerbe* organization, attempted to prove that northern Europe was the cradle of Western civilization and was taken in by the 'Ura-Linda-Chronicle', an obvious forgery (Jacob-Friesen 1934: 130–5). Herman Wille, another of these extremists, interpreted the megaliths of Scandinavia as Germanic temples, identified as the inspiration for Greek and Roman temples as well as early medieval churches (Jacob-Friesen 1950: 2–3). Wilhelm Teudt's interpretation of the Externsteine near Detmold as a Germanic temple (FIGURE 4) was supported by a large number of amateur prehistorians, and his encyclopaedic *Germanische Heiligtümer* (1934) identified, among other things, a complex system of solar observatories throughout areas of Germanic settlement.

The interpretation of the Externsteine gener-

ated heated and often vindictive debate, demonstrating the extent to which fringe research was rejected by the mainstream (Focke 1943). As Koehl points out, 'the second- and third-rate minds of the "scientists" which the Ahnenerbe, for example, sponsored tended to make SS "research" the laughingstock of the universities Himmler wished to penetrate' (1983: 115). The phenomenon of *Germanenkitsch* was parodied in *Germanenerbe* in a regular humour column (FIGURE 5), partly to disassociate the Ahnenerbe prehistorians from the 'fringe' (*Germanenerbe* 1936: 87; 265).

Some researchers established before 1933 became high-ranking party officials, among them Hans Reinerth and the Austrian Oswald Menghin. These individuals consciously participated in what was at best a distortion of scholarship, and at worst a contribution to the legitimation of a genocidal authoritarian regime. They were certainly aware of what they were doing, and they must have been equally aware that much of the work they were producing under the auspices of Nazi ideology had absolutely no basis in archaeological fact.

As a result of his party career and his anti-semitic writings (Menghin 1934), Oswald Menghin was summarily removed from his post as Austrian Minister of Education and Culture in 1945, spent some time in an American internment camp and ended up in South America, where he continued to excavate and publish, primarily in Spanish (*Der Schlern: Festgabe für Oswald Menghin* 1958: 73–6). His Spanish publications, interestingly enough, begin around 1942, well before the disastrous end of the war.

Hans Reinerth was Rosenberg's *Reichsbeauftragter für deutsche Vorgeschichte* (a plenipotentiary position) from 1934 to the end of the war; he has remained active on the archaeological scene in Baden-Württemberg, and his works continue to be published and sold, including the volume *Pfahlbauten am Bodensee* (1986), although most of its conclusions and interpretations are outdated. Recently officials in the town of Bad Buchau, where Reinerth excavated the Wasserburg Buchau in the 1920s, suppressed a pamphlet prepared by young archaeologists presently working in the area because it described Reinerth's party activities (*Pfahlbauten* 1984(3): 6–7).

The racist tone of Reinerth's writing is well

Hier zuckersüß lieblich.

**Das Brot unserer Vorfahren**

in verfeinerter Form, gesundes Nahrungsmittel von würzigem Geruch, aromatischem, kräftigen Geschmack blutbildend und nervenstärkend Germanen-Brot süßlich genossen, schafft gesundes Aussehen, weiße Zähne, reine Gesichtshaut, Wohlbefinden.

Kindern und Erwachsenen ärztlich warm empfohlen.

**Germanen**

**Kraft-Brot**

**Vollkorn**

von gesch.

Das zu diesem Naturbrot verwendete Germanenmehl enthält keine Chemikalien, es wird nach besonderem Verfahren so hergestellt, daß nur die unverdaulichen, atrophie Hülsen ausgeschlossen und größte Sauberkeit, Reinheit und Erhaltung sämtlicher Nährstoffe gewährleistet wird

Seit 1908 bewährt und stets vorzuziehen. Nur echt mit dem Germanenkopf.

Alleinhersteller des Meines

**GREIFENMÜHLE**

ERNST MANNROTH POST KLITZOW BEZ. STETTIN

FIGURE 5. Example of 'Germanenkitsch' advertisement from the journal *Germanenerbe* (1936).

illustrated by the three-volume tome entitled *The Prehistory of the German Tribes* (1945). Key passages deal with the genetic superiority of the Germanic peoples and their natural right to those territories to the east of Germany or anywhere else inhabited presently or at any time in the past by German peoples. Reinerth's unprofessional harassment of colleagues who

disagreed with his views is described in detail by Bollmus (1970: 153–235).

#### *The Mitläufer*

The majority of German archaeologists were *Mitläufer* or passive fellow-travellers, to translate an untranslatable German term. These were the unnamed thousands who taught what they were told to teach in schools and universities, and accepted state funding with little question or comment. J.G.D. Clark's discussion in *Archaeology and society* clearly states the dilemma of German prehistorians: 'Will it not happen that under dictatorial conditions activities paid for by the state will be used for state purposes?' (1939: 202).

Although the *Mitläufer* clearly constituted the critical mass in the attempted *Gleichschaltung* (political and ideological coordination of all intellectual pursuits) of the discipline by the Party, their inactive rôle makes their contribution difficult to assess. Yet it is precisely their inaction which explains how the discipline could practise 12 years of self-delusion so effectively. The acquiescent silence of the *Mitläufer* was crucial, their passivity representing a *de facto* sanctioning of NS policies and attitudes – a phenomenon that extended to all other areas of public life.

#### *The opposition*

A third category is constituted by the critical opposition and the victims of the regime. These archaeologists were both highly visible and relatively few in number, so their rôle can be studied more easily. Victims of the regime were persecuted on the basis of race or political views, and occasionally both. Gerhard Bersu, who had trained a generation of post-war archaeologists in the field techniques of settlement archaeology, was prematurely retired by the National Socialists from the directorship of the Römisch Germanische Kommission in 1935. His refusal to condone or conduct research tailored to NS ideological requirements, in addition to his rejection of the Kossinna school and its nationalist, racist doctrine of hyperdiffusionism, led to the abrupt interruption of his career as a prehistorian until the end of the war (Krämer 1965). The official reason given for the witch-hunt led by Reinert under the auspices of the Amt Rosenberg was Bersu's Jewish heritage (Bollmus 1970: 163;

Sklenar 1983: 160). By 1950 Bersu was back in Germany, again directing the Römisch Germanische Kommission.

Hans Kühn and Peter Goessler were also forced to leave, together with Jewish prehistorians like Paul Jacobsthal, who finished his *magnum opus* on Celtic art in English at Cambridge. Hugo Obermaier resided in Spain and Switzerland, having turned down a chair at the University in Berlin 'because the National Socialists had already taken possession of the field' (IPEK 1956: 104). Franz Weidenreich, who had to give up his chair at the University in Frankfurt, went to Chicago as Director of the Geological Institute in China from 1935 to 1941, and as Professor at the Museum of Natural History in New York after 1941 (IPEK 1956: 104). Gero von Merhart was another victim of the Reinert witch-hunt. Despite the efforts made by his student Werner Buttler, a member of Himmler's private corps, to fend off the defamatory attacks, von Merhart was prematurely retired in 1940. In a letter to Buttler, who was in the front lines during this period of harassment, von Merhart is both bitter and resigned (Bollmus 1970: 210):

All I can say, Buttler, is that I am being treated in an unbearable manner. My way of life has been destroyed, I have been defamed in a way which can never be made good, since my resilience has been dealt a fatal blow . . . No one will ever be able to convince me that I have not been carelessly and irresponsibly accused, condemned without a trial, and finished as an honest and dutiful citizen of the state . . .

A critical faction, consisting of archaeologists like K.H. Jacob-Friesen, Ernst Wahle and Carl Schuchhardt, were cautious in their opposition yet managed to hold on to their positions. Jacob-Friesen openly criticized the lunatic fringe, especially Herman Wirth and his support of the *Ura-Linda-Chronicle*. In a 1934 article he claimed to speak for the professional mainstream in warning against the excesses of nationalistic and racist manipulation of archaeological data (1934).

Jacob-Friesen saw himself as a patriotic German prehistorian for whom the complete distortion of archaeological data by party doctrine was a defamatory attack on German scholarship and the international reputation of German scholars. Dogma requires complete, unquestioning

faith in its precepts, and 'faith', according to Jacob-Friesen, 'generally begins where knowledge ends' (1950: 1). As early as 1928 his article, 'Fundamental questions of prehistoric research', criticized research along the lines of Gobineau's doctrine of racial superiority, remarking: 'Racial philosophy in our time has mutated into racial fanaticism and has even been extended into politics' (1950: 2). As he himself noted, by 1933 this was an unpopular opinion, and he was asked, in the tradition of the medieval inquisition, to retract these statements publicly. He refused; in response W. Hülle, Reinerth's second-in-command, issued a statement warning against such heresies. 'That was how scholarship was conducted in the Third Reich!' Jacob-Friesen concluded bitterly in his 1950 *apologia* (1950: 2).

In 1941 Ernst Wahle published a critical analysis of Kossinna's theories, 'On the ethnic interpretation of prehistoric cultural provinces', which, as Eggers points out, took a considerable amount of courage (1986: 237). Unfortunately most of these gestures remained isolated incidents, and real debate on topics like Kossinna's research did not begin until after the war. Men like Wahle, Jacob-Friesen and Wilhelm Unverzagt, the editor of the relatively independent *Prähistorische Zeitschrift*, represented the voice of reason in German archaeology which attempted to maintain standards of scholarly objectivity, with little effect, as Jacob-Friesen himself admits (1950: 4). Without support in the Party machine, organized resistance was impossible, and most criticism either ignored or censured.

It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of these individuals, or the reasons for their survival. Internal conflicts and the absence of a general policy with regard to dissenting scholars were certainly part of the reason. Arousing the personal enmity of a man like Reinerth could be enough to destroy a career. Although the situation in Germany was less life-threatening than in the Soviet Union under Josef Stalin, where hundreds of prehistorians and archaeologists were killed (Childe 1935; Clark 1939: 196–7), it was a difficult time for researchers committed to an international, rather than a National Socialist, perspective.

### Effects on excavations and research

Some research designs and interpretations of SS excavations were explicitly geared toward the

Party's goal of investigating Germanic remains in all modern geographic regions, especially in eastern Europe where it was politic to prove previous Germanic habitation on the basis of material culture (e.g. Kunkel 1935). In general, however, excavation reports paid lip-service to the party in introduction and conclusion, while the rest was 'business as usual' (Clark 1939: 202). Sound work was done during this period in spite of political pressure. The vocabulary carefully conformed to the policies of the funding source, but the methodology was relatively unaffected. Given enough time, of course, this would have changed, as new terms and concepts made a significant transformation in the orientation of the discipline inevitable. In 1935, the entire prehistoric and early historic chronology was officially renamed: the Bronze and Pre-Roman Iron Ages became the 'Early Germanic Period' (FIGURE 6), the Roman Iron Age the 'Climax Germanic Period', the Migration Period the 'Late Germanic' Period and every-

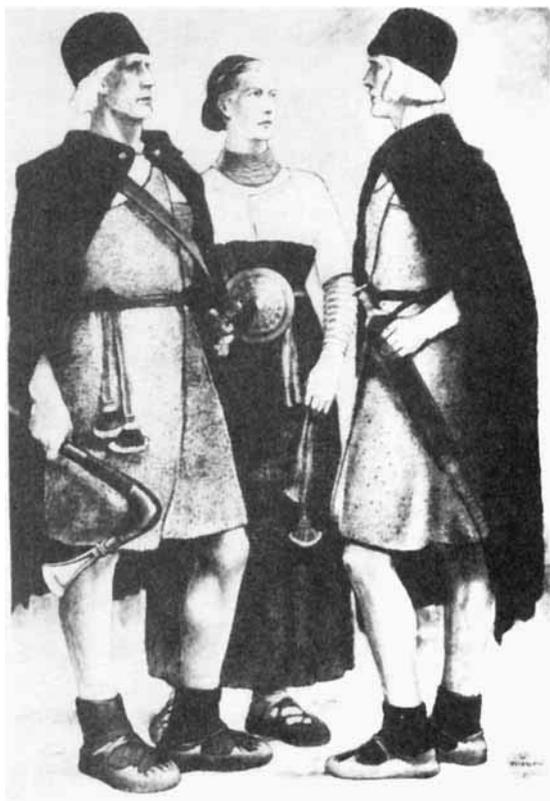


FIGURE 6. Bronze Age 'Germans' (Reinerth 1945: plate 5a).

thing from the Carolingians to the 13th century the 'German Middle Ages' (Petersen 1935: 147). A site continuously occupied from prehistoric times through to the present was to be excavated by Rosenberg's organization until Roman remains were uncovered, at which point the Römisch Germanische Kommission would deal with this 'non-German' material. The prehistoric strata underneath would again be excavated by the Amt Rosenberg (Bollmus 1970: 166). This patently ridiculous and impractical arrangement, engineered by Reinerth and Rosenberg, was never adopted. It was one reason many previously committed archaeologists, disenchanted with the Amt Rosenberg and its plenipotentiary, began to turn more and more, after 1937, to Himmler's Ahnenerbe for official support.

Several well-known sites began as Ahnenerbe projects at this time: the Viking trading post of Haithabu in Schleswig-Holstein, excavated by Herbert Jankuhn under SS supervision beginning in 1938 (Jankuhn 1935; 1938; 1939; 1940), the Neolithic settlement of Köln-Lindenthal excavated by Werner Buttler (Buttler & Haberey 1936), and the Hohmichele tumulus at the Early Iron Age Heuneburg, excavated by Adolf Rieth (1936).

Many smaller excavations, conducted with SS funding (Doppelfeld 1939), served a very specific purpose apart from their dubious scholarly value. They were intended to unite Germans – interested amateurs, locals, soldiers in the SS and the SA – in the retrieval, preservation and interpretation of prehistoric remains. Langsdorff & Schleif state specifically in a 1937 article that the primary beneficiary of such research was to be Germany's young people, not scholarship as such (1937: 82). Much of this rhetoric was reserved for official statements. Since it was necessary to use the proper code words to ensure continued support, their use does not prove that the writer accepted the general principles implied. Langsdorff & Schleif, in fact, appear as unsung heroes in Bollmus' account of their part in maintaining standards of archaeological research within the Ahnenerbe organization. Borderline research like the Externsteine excavations was discouraged by the Ahnenerbe after 1936, largely due to the influence of these two individuals (1970: 180–1). Götze warned against pseudo-archaeology of this sort as early

as 1933, although he was careful to explain that it was exaggerated claims of Germanic achievements he deplored, not the principle of Germanic superiority itself (1933: 70).

Field schools for young archaeologists combined political indoctrination with the Party emphasis on the outdoors and on healthy communion with one's peers. The director of a field school held in 1935 for 65 participants, one fifth of whom were women, stated: 'Naturally the intellectual and material culture of the Germanic world was the focus of the relevant presentations' (Geschwendt 1935: 74).

### Aftermath and legacy

The paralysis felt by many scholars from 1933 to 1945 continued to affect research in the decades after the war. The *anomie* and intellectual dislocation of this period are described by Wilhelm Unverzagt in his essay (1959: 163):

After Germany's collapse it initially seemed virtually impossible to begin rebuilding the discipline with any hope of success. The new wielders of political power viewed prehistory with deep mistrust, an attitude which seemed understandable in view of the abuse of the results of prehistoric research on the part of National Socialist leaders with regard to questions of education and politics.

Veit (1989) interprets the predominantly pragmatic orientation of prehistoric research in West Germany today as a direct result of intellectual shellshock, 'a reaction against the inflated claims of Nazi studies in prehistory', especially the ethnic interpretation of the Kossinna school (1989: 48). As Veit also points out, 'the reasons for the misuse of his [Kossinna's] ideas, which were, after all, based on the nature of archaeological knowledge, remained largely unexplained' (1989: 39).

The surviving older generation were faced with a terribly reduced student population after 1945. The journals between 1939 and 1945 contain hundreds of obituaries, written mainly by senior scholars, occasionally in the front lines themselves, who watched a whole generation of young archaeologists die. It has taken several decades to replace the losses of war, emigration and extermination. Most of the scholars who were graduate students during this 12-year period had to grapple with a double burden: a humiliating defeat and the disorienting experience of being methodologically

'deprogrammed'. There was neither time nor desire to examine the reasons for the 'German prostitution of archaeology' (Piggott 1983: Foreword).

The essence of propaganda, as Himmler and Rosenberg were aware, is the ability to manipulate language and symbols. A race, nation or individual can be defamed by terms with negative implications – 'barbarian', 'underdeveloped', 'primitive'. Rosenberg was adept at twisting archaeological and anthropological data to impugn Jews, the Catholic church and Communists alike. Terms like 'hebraic parasites', 'ruling priest class' and 'red subhumanity' are liberally sprinkled throughout his *magnum opus* with invocations of the classics, the natural sciences, Goethe and any other authority which could be pressed into service (Rosenberg 1930).

Archaeology lends itself particularly well to intentional misinterpretation. Almost-truths and half-facts have been used in archaeological contexts other than Nazi Germany to support racist doctrines and colonial military expansion, or to establish political legitimacy for shaky regimes (Clark 1939: 197ff.; Silberman 1982; 1988; Garlake 1984; Silverberg 1986; McConnell 1989; etc.). One particularly dangerous aspect of archaeological writing is its tendency toward professional jargon which tends to obscure rather than reveal meaning. The multidisciplinary nature of prehistoric research, in and of itself an admirable thing, lends itself too easily to abuse under the guise of science or other falsely appropriated authority. Prehistory is particularly vulnerable to manipulation because it so often depends on a minimum of data and a maximum of interpretation (Klejn 1971: 8).

It is difficult to read Rosenberg's *Myth of the 20th century* today and remember that his theories – however preposterous and absurd they now sound – constituted part of the platform for the Nazi doctrine of racial purity that culminated in the extermination of over six million human beings. Germany's archaeological community played a part in legitimating notions of Germanic racial and cultural superiority; yet prehistoric archaeology is the only social science discipline in Germany which has still to publish a self-critical study of its rôle in the events of the 1930s. Historians and Germanists have published several such stu-

dies. The historian Karl Ferdinand Werner says of this phenomenon of denial among historians (1967:103):

One didn't want to hear about one's past, of which one was now ashamed (how *could* one have believed in this Hitler person!), and expressed this basically praiseworthy attitude by simply denying this past. Since the great majority of Germans was interested in such suppression, very little opposition could arise. After the fact they all became, if not resistance fighters at least sympathetic to the resistance; indeed, they are perhaps resisting even now, when it is no longer dangerous to do so, to make up for the missed opportunity.

It is easy to condemn the men and women who were part of the events which transformed the German archaeological community between 1933 and 1945, more difficult really to understand the choices they made or avoided in the context of the time. Many researchers who began as advocates of Reinerth's policies in the Amt Rosenberg and Himmler's Ahnenerbe organization later became disenchanted. Others, who saw the system as a way to develop and support prehistory as a discipline, were willing to accept the costs of the Faustian bargain it offered.

The benefits were real. Many of them still exist today – in government programmes, museums and institutes, amateur organization, and a widespread popular support of and interest in prehistory. Academic scholarship outside Germany also benefited; not all of Kossinna's theories or those of his advocates can be dismissed out of hand (Eggers 1986: 200), and quite a lot of the work done from 1933 until the end of the war was ground-breaking research. Scholars like V. Gordon Childe adapted Kossinna's theories to their own work. Ideas such as the identification of ethnic groups in the archaeological record and the concept of independent invention on the part of indigenous European cultures unaffected by Eastern influence are some examples (Klejn 1974: 8). Settlement archaeology benefited from excavations like those at Köln-Lindenthal and Haithabu (C. Evans 1989).

More recently a number of studies dealing with certain aspects of the use and abuse of archaeology under the National Socialists in Germany have been published by non-German researchers (Schnapp 1977; Baker 1988;

McCann 1988; 1989; C. Evans 1989). The only German prehistorian who has approached the topic to date has done so indirectly through the study of Kossinna's theories and their political and cultural significance (Veit 1984; 1989). Yet organizations like the ones recently formed by graduate students in prehistory at the Universities of Berlin (West) and Kiel (*Offener Brief* 1989) seem to indicate that a new wind is blowing in the corridors of German academe. The theme of a symposium held recently in Berlin by the organizations 'AUTONOME SEMINAR' (Berlin) and 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft Archäologie und Faschismus' (Kiel) was 'Ur- und Frühgeschichtsforschung und Nationalsozialismus'. The topics under discussion indicate a critical awareness not just of the forces that transformed prehistoric research from 1933 to 1945, but of the enduring legacy of that period in the academic community today.

Unfortunately, conservative elements in German prehistoric archaeology which turn a blind eye to the abuses of the 1930s labour under the influence of a continuing 'unconscious ethnocentric fixation' (Veit 1989: 50). Dieter Korell (1989: 178), for example, attempts to resuscitate Kossinna's concept of prehistory as a 'preeminently national discipline':

Gustaf Kossinna spoke programmatically of a 'preeminently national discipline' . . . The term 'national' has nothing whatsoever to do with the current discussion and labeling of 'nationalism' . . . German prehistory is a national discipline. The life and suffering of a living people are represented by the discipline, and in the final analysis can only be understood in its entire significance by Germans and their close ethnic kin.

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This trend can be seen in the context of a lengthy term in power for the current conservative government and is a subtext of the *Historikerstreit* which has made revisionist history the topic of much recent debate (R.J. Evans 1989). I mention it here because it emphasizes the importance of an in-depth critical study of prehistoric archaeology under the National Socialists.

As C. Evans says: 'It is precisely because so much archaeological evidence is ambiguous, and therefore open to re-interpretation, that there is a need to understand the rôle and historic constitution of archaeology's disciplinary consensus over time' (1989: 447). History (and by association, prehistory) informs communal self-image. An awareness of origins is necessary to construct and maintain self-esteem and self-understanding. History legitimizes individuals and their actions within society. In this context the distortion of prehistoric research for political purposes has grave implications for the integrity of the structural framework of a society as a whole. This is the most important legacy of the German example. We cannot afford to ignore the responsibility the relationship between archaeology and politics places upon interpreters of the past.

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