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Topic Area: VW beetle car: the Käfer



Image: vwexport1300

http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:VW_K%C3%A4fer_Baujahr_1966.jpg

A Volkswagen Beetle. Production year: 1966. One of the 21.529.464 produced between 1938 and 2003. Much loved throughout the world as a dependable and affordable vehicle, although its beginnings are linked to Adolf Hitler who commissioned Ferdinand Porsche to design a 'People's Car' that could carry two

adults and three children and was low in price and running costs. Porsche's 'KdF-Wagen', ('Kraft durch Freude', meaning strength through joy, part of Nazi ideology) was a great success with buyers. Legend has it that it was in the New York Times that the name 'Beetle' was first used in 1938 and only after that was this name taken back into German as 'Käfer.' But because of the start of the war production never got going. The original model had a 'Brezelfenster', an oval shaped rear window, vertically divided into two parts which gave it the appearance of a pretzel. When production resumed in earnest after World War II it was the 'Brezelkäfer' that became immensely popular and very soon a symbol of the 'Wirtschaftswunder', the economic miracle in post-war Germany. 'Er läuft und läuft und läuft' (it runs and runs and runs) – so the advertising slogan (also running and running). And it did, right into the new millennium. The last Beetle was produced in Mexico in 2003, but between 1938 and 2003 the car's characteristic shape was never substantially changed. Only the shape of the rear window evolved, which for those interested in such things was an indicator of the production year of each subsequent model. After the 'Brezelfenster' came a simple oval rear window and then a bigger rectangular shaped one. Inside, from the sixties models onwards, the steering wheel had the crest of the city of Wolfsburg on its central disk, home of the 'Volkswagen AG', the biggest car plant in the world. The early models had indicators which flipped out sideways from the middle of the side frame. The Beetle never had four doors (unthinkable), so getting in and out of the back seats was forever tricky. It didn't offer luxuries, but it worked and its iconic status was unshaken throughout its long life. It could have only been a Beetle that was driven into the river Elbe in a famous scene in a German Road Movie of the 70s: 'Kings of the Road' (Wim Wenders, 1976) when one lost traveller meets another: he climbs out of the sun-roof of the slowly sinking car. An iconic scene, an iconic car.

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Topic Area: The record player



Although German born inventor Emile Berliner was not the first to devise a machine for reproducing recorded music and sound it is his version of the technology that become the preminent technological expression and visual sign for the popular mass consumption of music purchased and listened to in the home in the twentieth century.

His 1890's design provided two significant advantages over the slightly earlier Edison Phonograph. The two dimensional circular records (or discs) with their music contained in a spiral groove allowed the more efficient mass "pressing" of records on a production line. Incidentally, this template also provided the opportunity for an "a side" and "b side", concepts which would later exercise the critical faculties of the popular music press for decades to come.

In addition, the revolving platter with its central locating spindle could quickly and easily be loaded with the next disc which was then set playing by a clockwork and later electric motor.

The advent of the long-playing 33rd rpm 12 inch "long player" in the late forties and the later introduction of stereo sound saw the advent of home "hifi" and Berliner's basic template remained unaltered as the new "hifi" record players refined and improved the engineering of a largely unchanged design concept. Some of these early hifi designs are sought by collectors and listeners alike and can change hands for thousands of pounds, whilst brand new high-end vinyl players can cost the same or even more.

Popular home record listening took place on the more modest and affordable domestic record player or radiogram (record player and radio combined) whilst the "jukebox" exploited the capacity for easy disc changing in an automated, multidisc design for public spaces.

Berliner also founded the preminent German classical record label Deutsche Grammophon, although German rock music was only later to have a world impact in the 60s and 70s with the advent of the uniquely German "Kosmische Musik" (more crudely referred to as *Krautrock*).

As far as its visual ubiquity is concerned, the Gramophone (or "Plattenspieler") is often, and very ably, represented by a circle, partly bisected by a line (representing the tone arm), a sign often seen wherever recorded music is present.

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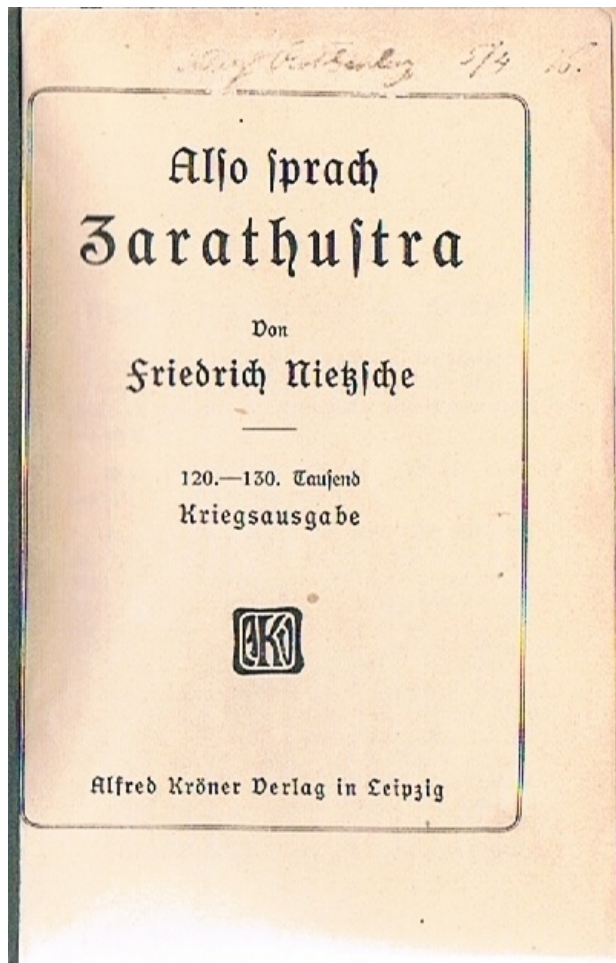


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Topic: Nietzsche



1914 proved a turning-point in the long and complex history of Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844-1900) reception in Germany. Hitherto, Nietzsche had been perceived as a pan-European thinker, with radical, potentially revolutionary ideas and an evident aversion to the German Empire. In the course of World War I, however, conservative and nationalist intellectuals gradually appropriated him as a patriotic and essentially German thinker, invoking some of his principal ideas – "the will to power", "the transvaluation of all values", and "the Overman" – to glorify the German war effort. Nietzsche's sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, played an important role in this process, notably with her essay "Nietzsche and War", which was published in several German newspapers on 10 September 1914. The essay portrayed Nietzsche as deeply attached to the spirit of Prussian militarism and as a "friend of war" who had reminded his fellow Germans that "the good war hallowed every cause" and exhorted them to "live dangerously". In her capacity as director of the Nietzsche Archive in Weimar, Elisabeth also oversaw the publication of a so-called "war edition" ("Kriegsausgabe") of her brother's most famous work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883). This was an affordable, popular edition released by Kröner Verlag in Leipzig and prefaced by a selection of "Nietzsche aphorisms on war and peace", chosen by Elisabeth. The "Kriegsausgabe" of *Zarathustra* went through multiple reprints between

1914 and 1918, reaching a print run of over 200,000 copies. The above image shows the title page of the 1916 edition.

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Topic Area: The Holy Roman Empire / Charlemagne's crown

images taken by Allie Caulfield https://www.flickr.com/photos/wm_archiv/



THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

The object labelled Charlemagne's crown reminds us of a long history that ended over a century before the Third Reich began but which nonetheless continues to shape Germany and German-speaking Europe even today. Like the polity which it recalls, the crown has a complex history. The object itself is a replica made in 1913 of the imperial crown which was once kept in Nuremberg and has been in Vienna since 1796. It is almost certain that this crown originated around 960, made by a Lower Rhineland workshop, perhaps in Cologne. Whether Charlemagne himself was actually crowned is unclear and while we know that he crowned his son at Aachen in 813 we do not know what crown was used.

Even so this crown has come to stand for the Holy Roman Empire which originated in Charlemagne's Frankish realm which comprised much of what we know as France and Germany. It was in the eastern part of this kingdom that a German monarchy became established in the ninth and tenth centuries. The legitimacy and special status of this monarchy derived substantially from its presumed descent from Charlemagne and from the inheritance of his role as protector of the papacy and guardian of the Church. All of this was implicit in the title *Das Heilige Römische Reich deutscher Nation* (Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation), as the German polity formally became known by about 1500.

The term *Reich* is found in a variety of European languages and it has several applications in German. *Das Reich* is different, however, and it derives its suggestive force from a

combination of secular and religious sources. This German Reich – or the *Altes Reich* as it is commonly referred to by modern historians in order to distinguish it from the German Reich of 1871– played a central role on European history from the Middle Ages until its dissolution in 1806. Thereafter its legacy periodically continued to inspire and preoccupy groups of all political persuasions into the late twentieth century.

Origins

The German Reich or Holy Roman Empire claimed descent from the Roman Empire, which its emperors viewed as the overarching world order, the *imperium* of which the various parts could never be more than *regna* or kingdoms. After AD 380 the Roman Empire was also a Christian empire. The notion of the *imperium* was consequently further enriched by the idea derived from the Old Testament Book of Daniel that the world was currently in the last of four empires that spanned the history of the entire world. The *imperium* was thus a divinely sanctioned world order.¹

The Medieval Reich

By the time the Roman Empire fell into terminal decline in the sixth and seventh centuries these grand claims were in reality worth very little. The inability of the last emperors even to defend Rome led the papacy to appeal to the Frankish rulers in the west, though the popes had little more to offer than the old Roman titles and dignities. At first, again, they meant very little in practice. But after Charlemagne, successive inheritances and conquests led to the emergence during the tenth century of a German monarchy based on the three kingdoms of Germany, Burgundy, and Italy. The *imperium* thus comprised three *regna*, and its rulers were designated protectors of the papacy and claimed a kind of stewardship over the Church. This set them apart from the monarchs who emerged elsewhere during the Middle Ages. The German emperors were *advocatus ecclesiae*; the French kings were merely *rex christianissimus*, the Spanish simply *rex catholicus*.²

In fact the Emperors were unable to assert lasting control over their kingdoms. By the mid-thirteenth century, when the Hohenstaufen dynasty died out, very little remained of any *imperium*. Burgundy had more or less completely gone; the kingdom of Italy had shrunk to a small number of insecurely held fiefdoms in the north. Stewardship over the church was rendered almost meaningless by the perennial disputes that ran between popes and emperors over whose authority took precedence. Did the temporal sword come before the spiritual one, or was it the other way round? Even in the German kingdom, the position of the crown was weakened by the progressive alienation of crown lands as successive emperors tried to raise money or buy supporters in their losing battle to assert themselves in the face of the powerful German dukes and princes. Furthermore, after the end of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, the Imperial succession was more or less continually disputed.³ At one time there were no less than three rival emperors, none of whom had any real power.

Nationalist historians in Germany in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century believed that the end of what they called the *Kaiserzeit* marked the beginning of six centuries of decline in German history.⁴ No dynasty emerged that was capable of imposing its will on

Germany to create a strong and unified state. Then the Reformation created the religious division of Germany in the early sixteenth century. German or Imperial institutions were progressively paralysed and the German lands were subjected to varying forms and degrees of foreign influence. Finally the Reich collapsed ignominiously in the last decade of the eighteenth century and was dissolved in 1806.

Nationalist scholars lamented the failure of the Reich in the later Middle Ages to become the kind of strong national state that the nineteenth century believed was essential for the preservation and promotion of the national interests. In fact, however, something altogether different and more interesting emerged. Gradually an enduring balance of powers between the Emperor and the German estates was established. The term *Kaiser und Reich* came to stand for a mutually dependent relationship and for the system of political compromise to which it gave rise.⁵

The system was moulded by the crises of the fifteenth century.⁶ Internally, problems of law and order often threatened to plunge the Reich into anarchy. Externally, a series of threats – the Hussites in the 1420s and 1430s, the kings of France and the dukes of Burgundy and finally the Turks and the Hungarians from the 1460s – underlined the inability of the German princes to defend their community adequately. Both Sigismund and Frederick III were essentially absentee Emperors, more preoccupied with the defence of their own personal lands than with the Reich. Meanwhile, however, the gatherings of his vassals gradually evolved into a Reichstag, which became the embodiment of the political nation. And the growing sense of solidarity amongst the estates was reinforced by the requests for financial and military assistance that the Habsburg emperors made after 1438. Their peripheral location in the east of the Reich prevented them from ever becoming a national monarchy. On the other hand their enduring attraction as German rulers lay in the fact that they were just powerful enough to shoulder the main part of the burden of defending the Reich against both the Turks and the French.

The Early Modern Reich

The new political realities were formalised in constitutional arrangements negotiated during the reign of Maximilian I after 1493.⁷ These represented a compromise between new imperial ambitions and the interests of the German princes. Maximilian devoted much of his life to an attempt to restore the empire to what he believed to be its rightful extent. Having inherited the duchy of Burgundy on the death of Charles the Bold in 1477 he was well placed to do so. By the time he became Emperor in 1493 he was well on the way to establishing his position in two sets of hereditary lands. In the south-east he had the traditional Habsburg *Erblande*, with claims to both the Bohemian and Hungarian crowns. In the west his Burgundian inheritance complemented the older Habsburg lands in Alsace, to form an extended block of territories from the Sundgau in the south to the Low Countries in the north. From that position of strength, he planned to vanquish the Turks, to re-establish the Italian kingdom and gain control over the papacy and Venice, and even to restore the old medieval kingdom of Burgundy starting with the re-conquest of Provence. These ambitions involved him in almost

continuous wars with France, which wanted parts of Burgundy and also to establish hegemony over northern Italy.

Maximilian depended on Germany for both money and men, which required the consent of the Reichstag. In appealing for regular taxes and military levies the emperor was in effect proposing a major constitutional innovation. The German estates countered with a series of proposals designed to curb royal aspirations and safeguard peace and stability within the Reich. Neither side got exactly what it wanted. The Emperor failed to enlarge his prerogative powers, in particular the right to levy taxes or to raise a German army. The estates failed to establish a Reichsregiment or central governing body of their own, largely independent of the emperor. On the other hand the dualist system of *Kaiser und Reich* was reaffirmed and the right to legislate, to tax and to levy armies was tied explicitly to the agreement of that dual entity in the Reichstag. Furthermore a perpetual public peace was agreed. To regulate it an imperial court of justice, the Reichskammergericht, was set up and regional Kreise were subsequently organised to enforce its judgements.

The compromises reached in the years 1495 to 1512 created a constitutional framework for the German Reich that lasted until it was dissolved in 1806. Its final form was only achieved in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Yet the foundations were laid around 1500 for what became an enduring *Rechts-, Verteidigungs- und Friedensordnung* – a system of law, defence and peace in central Europe. It ensured the survival of the hundreds of small German territories, most of which would have been incapable of survival as independent units in the competitive world of the European powers. It both provided these territories with protection from external threat and served to prevent conflict between them. It was thus predicated on the principle of non-aggression and collective self-defence. Finally, as a *Rechtsordnung*, the Empire developed mechanisms to secure the rights both of rulers and, more extraordinarily, of subject against ruler. Its judicial institutions contributed to the evolution of a legal culture unprecedented elsewhere in Europe.⁸

The early modern Reich was unique as a system characterised by collective-corporate representative and decision-making mechanisms. From the Reichstag down to the Kreise, decisions were made collectively. Where the older nationalist tradition saw a hopelessly archaic system that rarely made decisions at all, modern research has revealed a system in which consensus was regarded as the highest good.⁹ Decisions were generally reached painfully slowly, but that was because all the estates had a voice. Often decisions were never reached at all, but that was because the agreement of all was a precondition for a binding resolution. In the light of contemporary experiences in the European Union, such procedures seem far from unusual, and even positive. Indeed some have even seen the Holy Roman Empire as a kind of precursor of a united Europe.¹⁰

Of course the Reich's activities were not always very effective. Sixteenth-century attempts to regulate currency, for example, or even to create a single currency failed completely. Yet the solidarity of the German estates survived the religious divisions of the Reformation. Indeed the experience of dealing with the problems thrown up by the religious issue strengthened their attachment to the Reich. There were, of course, also periods in which the system broke

down, notably during the Thirty Years War. But in that experience Germany is perhaps not unlike France, the Netherlands and England. For three centuries after 1500, the Reich both preserved the variety of the German estates and maintained their collective solidarity.

As a term denoting a functioning political system, Reich came to mean the German Reich only. Yet the word retained a variety of other meanings into the eighteenth century.¹¹ The Emperors still claimed the status of *advocatus ecclesiae*. For many Catholics, Reich stood for a universal, Christian world order, for which emperor and pope held joint responsibility. Obviously the Reformation and the internal division of Christendom weakened that claim. Protestant commentators increasingly argued that the Reich did not in fact have any Roman origins at all and claimed that it was a purely German empire, though Christian because the Germans had proved themselves the only worthy defenders of the faith. By the eighteenth century the question of origins was less important than the consensus among both Protestant and Catholic commentators that the Reich was a federation of princes. This polity was commonly referred to simply as 'das Reich' or 'Deutsches Reich', or even simply 'Deutschland.' Thirdly, however, some theorists still maintained that the extended Reich of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries continued to exist as a network of feudal ties that gave the emperor continuing overlordship over northern Italy, Savoy, Burgundy, Lorraine and Bohemia. Finally, in daily usage, Reich could refer specifically to the south west of Germany and Franconia, the areas where the medieval emperors had their crown lands. Even in the eighteenth century Prussians, Saxons or even Austrians spoke about travelling 'into the Reich' when they went to those parts.¹²

But the German Reich and its system formed the core. It was not a state in the modern understanding of that term; indeed it lacked many of the key attributes of a state, such as a central government or even a capital city. Nevertheless it was this system to which the suffix 'deutscher Nation' came to be attached during the formative period around 1500: informally at first, but then formally incorporated in the title of the Reich in 1512.¹³

The Legacy of the Reich

The Holy Roman Empire was destroyed in 1806 and no serious attempt was ever made to revive it. Yet, to this day, many commentators persist in imputing lines of continuity between the first Reich and the (second) *Kaiserreich* and the Third Reich. Such claims were indeed often made by disgruntled nationalist groups who aspired at various times to return Germany to the greatness they imagined it had enjoyed under the Hohenstaufen. Romantic conservatives and nationalists in the early nineteenth century, *grossdeutsch* propagandists in German and Austria in the late nineteenth century, advocates of an *Anschluss* between Germany and Austria after 1918, and historians convinced of the renewed relevance of the *Reichsidee* after 1933, all invoked the first Reich, especially its Hohenstaufen era, to justify their claims for the present and hopes for the future.

Until very recently historians have overlooked the extent to which the early modern Reich continued to play a role in the thinking of many Germans for several generations after 1806. This was undoubtedly a period characterised by a fascination with medieval ruins and by an

interest in both Catholic and Protestant ideas of restoring the 'wholeness' of Christianity, as it has allegedly existed in the Middle Ages. Yet the notion that the early modern Reich disappeared 'sang- und klanglos' was a later nationalist myth.¹⁴ In reality much of the discussion about the future of Germany revolved around arguments about how to restore the Old Reich of the eighteenth century while at the same time recognising the permanence of the geographical changes wrought since 1804 by French wars and by Napoleon.¹⁵ After 1815, liberal critics of the new German Confederation lamented the fact that it did not have a supreme court, like the Reichskammergericht and the Reichshofrat, which guaranteed the rights and liberties of subjects against the tyrannical will of their rulers.¹⁶ The sense of belonging to a wider German nation, including Austria, based on the principles that developed in the Reich from the fifteenth to the early nineteenth century, remained present in the various choral and gymnastics societies that played such a central role in the national movement after 1815. It was also evident on such occasions as the commemoration of the centenary of Schiller's birth in 1859.¹⁷

There was no real continuity between the first and the second and third Reich. The second Reich never referred to itself as such: formally, it was the Deutsches Reich and neither its title nor its official propaganda made reference to the first Reich. Indeed Bismarck explicitly said that the Prussian-German Reich had nothing to do with the Holy Roman Empire. Despite this elements of the old thinking about the Reich survived and Wilhelm II and his circle liked to invoke the medieval Hohenstaufen period as an antecedent of the present. Yet these historical 'memories' were essentially myths and they were increasingly mixed with new notions of empire derived from the British and French colonial experience and ideas of *Weltmachtspolitik* that proliferated from the 1890s.¹⁸

The 1920s, in which the Weimar Republic retained the formal title of Deutsches Reich, saw periodic waves of interest in an Anschluss between the German and Austrian republics. In the debates about this proposition references abounded to Grossdeutschland and to the Old Reich in which that had last been a reality.

Hitler and the National Socialist regime aimed to transform the Deutsches Reich into a Germanisches Reich.¹⁹ Yet despite the eclectic references to the German past made by Hitler and his colleagues, his main inspiration seems to have been the Roman Empire.²⁰ Indeed, Hitler had nothing but contempt for the Holy Roman Empire and not much more respect for the *Kaiserreich* and its political leaders. In 1939 he even tried to ban the use of the term 'Third Reich' to prevent the comparisons that some liked to make with the first and second Reich.²¹ It is true that after the outbreak of war the regime began to encourage the propagation of views that proclaimed that Hitler was about to turn the *Reichsidee* into practice and to secure the future of the German people. Yet this was perhaps testimony to the regime's cynical pragmatism rather than to any genuine conversion. Neither the racial nor the spatial dimensions of the Nazi Holy Roman Empire of the Germanic Nation bore any relation to the reality and ideals of the former Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.

After 1945 the very word 'Reich' fell victim to the turn away from the past. There was no possibility of even restoring the frontiers of 1937 let alone any form of Reich. The Deutsches

Reich of the past, in all of its varied manifestations became a central theme of the *Sonderweg* theory which historians used up to the 1980s to explain the alleged peculiarity and particularity of German history which led German society to embrace dreams of world domination and to execute the Holocaust.

Despite intensive academic research since 1945 into the history of the medieval and early Holy Roman Empire, the Reich now lost the relevance for contemporary society that had been evident before then. Events such as the Hohenstaufen exhibitions of 1977 and 2010 attracted large visitor numbers, as did the medieval section of the Holy Roman Empire exhibition at Magdeburg in 2006. It is notable, however, that this apparent popular enthusiasm for medieval history was not matched by a similar interest in the early modern history of the Reich. The efforts of some historians to emphasise that it might be seen as a precursor to a united Europe and the growing academic consensus of the modernity of many aspects of the legal and political culture of the early modern Reich have made little impact outside the scholarly realm. It seems that the old historical master narratives of decline have remained remarkably persistent into the twenty-first century.

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Notes

¹ Moraw, *Reich* 1984, pp. 428-30.

² Aubin, *Volk* 1988, p. 78.

³ Schubert, *Einführung* 1992, p. 221.

⁴ Wolgast, *Sicht* 2002, pp. 173-80, 183-7; Faulenbach, *Ideologie* 1980, pp. 38-40.

⁵ Schmidt, *Geschichte* 1999, pp. 40-4.

⁶ Moraw, *Reich* 1984, pp. 446-56.

⁷ Schmidt, *Geschichte* 1999, pp. 33-40.

⁸ Neuhaus, *Reich* 1997, pp. 1-5.

⁹ Ibidem, pp. 57-8.

¹⁰ Whaley, *Federal habits* 2002, pp. 25, 34.

¹¹ Aretin, *Alte Reich* 1993-97, vol. 1, pp. 38-41.

¹² Schmidt, *Geschichte* 1999, p. 10.

¹³ Nonn, *Reich* 1982.

¹⁴ Burgdorf, *Weltbild* 2006, pp. 154-5.

¹⁵ Tiedemann, *Kaisergedanke* 1932, pp. 23-86; Hahn, *Vom Alten Reich* 2008.

¹⁶ Hahn, *Bund* 2006; Schmidt, *Freiheit* 2013.

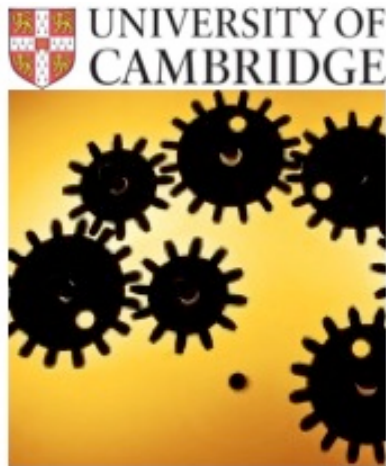
¹⁷ Langewiesche, *Nationsbildung* 2000, pp. 86-7; Noltenius, Schiller 1988; Becker, Schiller 1979, pp. 50-72. On the significance of the choral and gymnastics societies for nineteenth-century German nationalism, see Düding, *Nationalismus* 1984; Klenke, *Gesangvereine* 1998, pp. 1-131; Langewiesche, *Sängerbewegung* 2000; Langewiesche, *Turner* 2000.

¹⁸ Langewiesche, *Alte Reich* 2008, pp.225-9; Fehrenbach, *Wandlungen* 1969.

¹⁹ Kroll, *Reichsidee* 1999.

²⁰ Demandt, *Klassik*

²¹ Schreiner, *Führertum* 1985, p. 202.



Cambridge Online German for Schools

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Topic: The Hanseatic League





These London signs are affixed to the side walls of Canon Street station, which stands on the site of the Steelyard, the trading base of German merchants from those North German market towns which had banded together to form the Hanseatic League. The Hanseatic League dominated trade in the North Sea and the Baltic in the 13th – 16th centuries, centring on the cities of Lübeck, Hamburg and Bremen, with ‘foreign offices’ in, for example, London, Bergen (Norway) and Novgorod (Russia). Within the grounds of the Steelyard they rented rooms to live in, had warehouses, a garden to supply their table, and a guildhall in which they ate their meals together, all under the leadership of an Alderman. The German merchants, who came from a variety of towns in Northern Germany, enjoyed special trading privileges and tax concessions in England which they were very eager to preserve. Letters home, written in Middle Low German, give accounts of the merchants’ lives in London: the great floats which they contributed to the parade marking Henry VIII’s marriage to Anne Boleyn and her coronation, for instance, but also their anxiety after being raided by Sir Thomas More on suspicion of disseminating Lutheran literature at a time when England was still a Roman Catholic country.

The Hanseatic League is commemorated today in the label ‘Hansestadt’ attached to those cities which used to be at its heart, as well as in the airline name Lufthansa.

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Cambridge Online German for Schools

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Topic Area: GDR Watchtower



Baltic Sea watchtower, Kühlungsborn, near Rostock

(Image by Malchen53: <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benutzerin:Malchen53>)

Some citizens of the GDR found life in East Germany unbearable, especially after the Berlin Wall went up in August 1961. For them, the intrusions and restrictions of an existence under a dictatorial and, at times, inhumane regime were unacceptable. Those who decided to leave could do so through a long-drawn-out official application process which was by no means always successful and also brought with it the dangers of social ostracism. Or they could attempt an illegal escape. Those who did often came up with ingenious ways of trying to get out over the GDR's increasingly secure and deadly borders. The official term for this was 'Republikflucht' (desertion from the GDR). Those who attempted it and failed faced years in prison. Of the many thousands who tried, around a thousand were killed; at least 130 of them, but probably more, were shot dead trying to get over the Wall in Berlin.

It is easy to find stories of adventurous and nerve-racking escape attempts by increasingly desperate GDR citizens. For them, getting smuggled over the frontier in a suitcase in a car, rushing through a tunnel under the Wall patiently hollowed out in exasperating months, or flying in a self-made contraption over the border became a more attractive option than staying on. And some attempted making their way – by any means – across the Baltic to the Danish coast, a stretch of water of about 50 km. Getting out of the GDR via the Baltic was the third most popular way of trying to escape, after trying to cross the death zones of the inner German border or the Wall. But you had to get away from the coast first, and there were sea watch towers along it like the one in the photo, in Kühlungsborn near Rostock, from which the East German border troops cast their watchful eyes out over the waters at all times. Generally, of those who attempted to get out via the Baltic only about a fifth made it; others were caught before they even had put out to sea, or were drowned. Some were still missing 20 years after the fall of the Wall. Escape attempts with rubber dinghies or paddle boats were common; only few people decided to face swimming for many hours through the cold waters; it required not only huge stamina but also more unusual equipment, such as a wetsuit, not an inconspicuous item, and not one easily come by in the GDR.

There is much, often heart-breaking human drama in all these stories. A quick internet search on 'Flucht über die Ostsee' brings up a number of publications, such as a collection of escape stories by Christine and Bodo Müller, *Über die Ostsee in die Freiheit. Dramatische Fluchtgeschichten* (1996). One of them, which became very well-known, is that of Peter Döbler, a young medical doctor in the GDR, who in July 1971, having trained and prepared for years, swam from Kühlungsborn 45 kms across the Baltic and was picked up after about 24 hours by a sailing yacht off the island of Fehmarn, part of west Germany. What had been his motivation? A dream: he wanted to fish for 'Blue Marlin', like Santiago, the hero of Hemingway's story 'The Old Man and the Sea'. And this he did. After a spell as a practising doctor in Hamburg, he moved to the Cape Verde Islands where he set up a company offering fishing trips for tourists. One night he got talking to one of them: it turned out he had been the GDR coast guard deployed to coordinate the massive search operation after Döbler's escape.

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Cambridge Online German for Schools

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Topic Area: The Berlin Wall



In the years since reunification, Berlin has been a city in search of an identity, seeking to imagine a new role for itself as a cosmopolitan capital. Amongst other things, that identity has been associated with club culture (Berlin as international ‘Party-Hauptstadt’), but also with the particular material shapes and surfaces of the city – the city as thing, or as a collection of things. Another title that has been given to it is ‘Graffiti-Hauptstadt’, and this encapsulates a striking part of the city’s contemporary material culture. Graffiti is ubiquitous in the city, both in small-scale, illicit, autograph forms and in the shape of large-scale frescos commissioned for the ‘fire-walls’ that are a distinctive feature of the cityscape. The monumental ‘thing’, or more accurately part of a thing, in the image here is another kind of wall, a thing that exercised immense power over the lives of Berliners – and over the imagination, world-wide – during the Cold War years. Before the ‘fall’ of the Wall, a quarter of a century ago, it was a Janus-faced structure. On the Eastern side, it was blank and forbidding – potentially lethal; and on the Western side it was a huge canvas for the artwork, serious or scurrilous, of both informal daubers and international star artists – perhaps the biggest collaborative artwork on the globe. While most of the Wall has been removed, reduced to an easily overlooked line marked across the ground, a large section has been appropriated and maintained as the East Side Gallery (pictured here, in 2007). Today, it is one of Berlin’s most popular tourist destinations and – with its paintings, captions, slogans, and poems – a key site of memory for the city. It is under pressure, however, both from developers, who see its riverside location as prime ground for lucrative building, and from visitors, who feel the urge to add their own marks to the concrete canvas. What might be a suitable poem for this Berlin thing?

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Cambridge Online German for Schools

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Topic Area: Art: Sculpture by Ernst Barlach – der Schwebende

Ernst Barlach (1870- 1936) Der Schwebende



Image taken by Stefan Ostler <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sostler/>

Ernst Barlach was born in Wedel (near Hamburg), grew up in Mecklenburg and Ratzeburg and went on to study in Hamburg and Dresden. He later lived in Paris, then worked in the Westerwald, visited Russia and gained a scholarship to Florence and ultimately settled in Güstrow, in Mecklenburg.

Part of a cosmopolitan group of artists, Barlach took part in exhibitions supporting the modernist movement in the arts: a group called 'Sonderbund' (1909-1916) and exhibitions organised by Paul Cassirer in Berlin. These exhibitions introduced the new French Art Movements (Impressionism and Fauvism) to Germany and aimed to combine art from artists of different nationalities: German, Belgium, French, Russian, Dutch and others. A new idea at the time!

Ernst Barlach's sculpture *Der Schwebende* was originally created in 1927. However, today three examples exist: one in Cologne, one in Güstrow and one in Schleswig. The original was made for the cathedral in Güstrow to commemorate the loss of life in the First World War. This original bronze sculpture was declared 'degenerate' and confiscated by the Nazis in 1937. War memorials of the time typically had the dual function of both remembrance and a certain amount of hero worship. The figures depicted were often bold and brave soldiers, seemingly ready to fight again. Barlach's angel-like figure is introverted, passive, meditative even— and so was controversial from the first day of its installation in Güstrow Cathedral. Germany's burgeoning nationalism saw Barlach's memorials vilified as anti-German and unpatriotic. One

might even assume that the confiscated sculpture was smelted to produce ammunition after having been removed by the Nazis.

However, it wasn't completely lost. Friends of the artist had rescued the original mould, produced a second casting and had hidden it away. Unbelievably, this 'second original' survived the war and was bought by a museum in Cologne in 1952. Thus, the new *Schwebende* was installed in the Antoniterkirche in Cologne, serving now to commemorate both the victims of the First and Second World Wars. Later, a second and then a third 'new' casting were also made. One was destined for the original location of the *Schwebende* in Güstrow (produced in 1953) and, in the 1980's one was made for a museum in Schleswig.

The 'biography' of the object itself speaks of both the tyranny of the Nazi Regime and the bravery of Barlach's friends. The fact that the sculpture survived at all can be seen as a symbol of hope.

After the end of the Second World War, Güstrow (not far from Barlach's home town of Wedel near Hamburg) was part of the GDR. When the second new casting of the *Schwebende* was presented by the then Chancellor Helmut Schmidt to the community in Güstrow in 1981, Schmidt said that the Barlach sculpture not only served to memorialise Germany's united past but could also symbolise Germany's united ("gemeinsame") future. Prophetic words!

And yet, in 1934, Barlach had signed a statement (together with many other artists) pledging his allegiance to Adolf Hitler as the Führer. This may come as somewhat of a shock but might perhaps only be fully understood in the fuller (and possibly unavailable) context of Barlach's situation at the time. However, this pledge could not protect his art from censure by the Nazi Regime. In 1937, his sculptures were exhibited in the infamous exhibition of so-called 'degenerate art' staged by the Nazis in Munich. Barlach then was utterly out of favour with the Nazi Regime and yet his later rehabilitation by the west still saw his work dismissed in his original locale as decadent and vacant by the, by then, GDR.

Thus, arising from an intellectual movement whose objective was to unite art across Europe and strongly influenced by his own experience of the First World War, the contradictions and vicissitudes of Barlach's work must surely be seen as uniquely German in its inspiration and yet typically European in its scope.

There is a short, informative video in German available on youtube

- [Ernst Barlachs „Der Schwebende“ in der Antoniterkirche Köln](#) – youtube-Video

and a more comprehensive article in German on the Deutsche Welle website, also in German:

http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/der-schwebende.1124.de.html?dram:article_id=176934

It might also be of interest to note that a sculpture by Barlach, called *der Lesende Klosterschüler*, features in Alfred Andersch's post war novel *Sansibar oder der letzte Grund*.



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Topic Area: Artificial fertilizer, Justus Liebig



Justus Liebig (1803-1873)

(For image see <https://www.flickr.com/photos/tekniskamuseet-telehistoriska/>)

For thousands of years, humans knew that the addition of excrements or ash on fields leads to improved crop yields. However, only in the mid 19th century, the German chemist Justus von Liebig performed systematic scientific studies of the substances that plants require for growth. He identified phosphorus and nitrogen as the two most

important chemical elements for growth. He also realised that plants are not normally able to extract nitrogen from the atmosphere, where it constitutes close to 80% of the total volume, but that rather water-soluble chemical compounds of nitrogen are required. This insight led to a great mining boom in those countries that had natural deposits of such compounds, such as Chile. These deposits, guano and saltpetre, were mainly based on the weathered excrements of thousands of generations of seabirds – clearly a finite and practically non-renewable resource! Already towards the end of the 19th century, it was becoming clear that the world would run out of this precious stuff within the next few decades and that therefore, the industrialised nations, having become very dependent on this natural fertilizer, were facing a crisis. The only viable alternative that was proposed was the transformation of nitrogen from the air into a water soluble form, a perspective advertised as “bread from air” (“Brot aus Luft”). The fundamental challenge that this project was facing consisted in the highly inert nature of nitrogen towards chemical reactions of any kind. Nitrogen gas is a molecule which consists of two atoms of the element that are held together by an exceptionally strong chemical bond. This bond has to be broken first if nitrogen is to form a compound with any other type of atom. Very high temperatures of many hundreds of degrees Celsius lead to the required breakage of these bonds, but under such extreme conditions, the desired compounds would break down even more rapidly, resulting in negligible yields of the useful nitrogen compounds, such as ammonia. The solution of this problem was found by two German chemists, Fritz Haber and Carl Bosch, towards the end of the first decade of the 20th century. The strong involvement of German chemists is no coincidence, as chemical research was dominated by German Scientists in the second half of the 19th and first half of the 20th century. This dominance was probably due to the well-organised teaching and research in Chemistry at the many German universities which had been established there earlier than in most other countries. Fritz Haber had the idea to let nitrogen react at high pressures and moderately high temperatures (where the reaction yield is acceptable, but the reaction is slow) in the presence of a catalyst, a substance that accelerates a chemical reaction without changing its outcome. Carl Bosch, working for the chemical industry, then subsequently managed to develop this method into an industrial scale process. Both scientists were awarded Nobel prizes for their work (Haber 1919 and Bosch 1931).

The so-called Haber-Bosch process continues today to be by far the major industrial process by which nitrogen containing compounds for the production of fertilizer are made, and it is estimated that half of the nitrogen atoms in your body, dear reader, have undergone the Haber-Bosch reactions in a chemical plant.