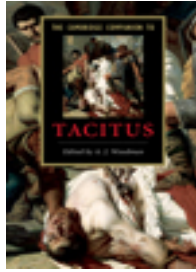


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A dangerous book: the reception of the *Germania*

But a German may drink beer; indeed, he should drink it as a true son of *Germania*, since Tacitus mentions specifically German *cerevisia*.

(Heinrich Heine, *Über Ludwig Börne. Eine Denkschrift*. 1840)

The *Germania* was praised as a *libellus aureus* ('golden booklet') upon its rediscovery in the fifteenth century. Following centuries saw it compared to the 'dawn' of German history, a gift of a 'benign fairy' and 'a bible'. After the collapse of the National Socialist (NS) regime, however, from the vantage of hindsight, Arnaldo Momigliano gave it high priority among 'the hundred most dangerous books ever written', and added that it was 'fortunately' not his task to speak about its influence.¹

The influence of Tacitus' *Germania* spans 450 years, starting with German humanists in the sixteenth century and ending with the NS downfall in 1945. Germany as a nation-state began to exist with the declaration of the German Empire in 1871. Before then, in the absence of political unity, a common past, culture and language were called upon to substantiate the German nation. But such a cultural nation has proved elusive too: the people within the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation² lived mostly in their communities with their regional traditions and local dialects and quite unaware of 'Germany'. 'What is German history?' is therefore a difficult question.³ Yet ever since the days of humanism north of the Alps there were writers who spoke of themselves as Germans and their *patria* as Germany. It thus existed in a paradoxical state of anticipation for centuries

¹ Momigliano (1966) 112–13. 'libellus aureus' occurs for the first time in the title of the *editio princeps* (Bologna 1472). The comparisons are those of J. Grimm, E. Norden and R. Benze.

² The *Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation* originated in the wake of the rule of Charlemagne and had the German 'nation' as its centre (while comprising various and varying substates from the Netherlands to the northern parts of Italy); it was officially dissolved during the Napoleonic Wars.

³ See Sheehan (1981) for this question.

before its realisation; Ernst Moritz Arndt expressed this paradox in the early nineteenth century: ‘German people? What are you, and where are you? I seek and cannot find you.’⁴ The *Germania* time and again provided a normative answer to this question (a fact that drew Heinrich Heine’s sarcasm, as quoted above). This use of **Tacitus** text also accounts for its twofold significance for the NS discourse: a ‘magnificent monument’, ‘a particular stroke of luck’,⁵ it inspired NS writers; and, more importantly, it contributed to the formation of those traditions that would ultimately fuse and culminate in NS ideology. The *Germania* fitted the frame it had helped to form: Hans Friedrich Karl Günther, the NS ‘expert’ on race, could cite *G. 4* affirmatively, as it had figured within the European race discourse right from its beginnings.

After early inconsequential receptions prior to its rediscovery, the *Germania* served as the foundational text for German humanists, who formed ‘Germany’ as an ‘imagined community’, actively ‘inventing traditions’ set in the Germanic past.⁶ Subsequent generations followed their lead, their modifications owed mainly to specificities of contemporary discourses, such as racist interpretations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The paradigmatic role of the Germanic past, however, remained mostly unchanged and unquestioned: the ‘Germanic revolution’ that National Socialists demanded was conceived of as a ‘homecoming’ to former shores.⁷ For them, as well as for generations of Germanophiles before them, **Tacitus** was the involuntary helmsman.

Early inconsequential receptions

The circle of **Tacitus** readers in late antiquity and the Middle Ages was limited, and traces of the *Germania* are few, though sweeping statements about dead silence seem exaggerated and affected by preconceptions.⁸ In addition to explicit references, traces of one *opus minus* may indicate the presence of the others, since it is likely that the *opera minora* were transmitted in one manuscript (especially in the Middle Ages).

The most extensive use of the *Germania* appears in the ninth century in Fulda, near to which, in Hersfeld, the only extant codex would be

⁴ See Petersen and Ruth (1934) 62.

⁵ See *Der Schulungsbrief* 2 (1935) 169; *NS Bildungswesen* 1 (1936) 41. Translations are my own.

⁶ See Anderson (1991), esp. ch. 2–3; Hobsbawm (1992) 6–7, 13–14.

⁷ See *NS Bildungswesen* 1 (1936) 38.

⁸ For the most comprehensive overview, see Perl (1990) 50–6; in addition, for reminiscences in Ambrosius, Eccehard and Widukind of Corvey, see Jacobi (1993); Mertens (2004) 46.

rediscovered in the *Quattrocento*.⁹ Rudolf of Fulda in his part of the *Translatio S. Alexandri*¹⁰ describes the Saxons, whose past is rendered with the help of the *Germania* (esp. 4, 9 and 10). What Tacitus, who is unnamed,¹¹ says there about the contemporary *Germani* is here in long literal quotations simply transferred to the *gens Saxonum*: noble heathen, who were freed of their dark errors (*a quantis errorum tenebris*) by the grace of God; who had come from Britain (*gens ... ab Anglis Britanniae incolis egressa*) and then tried to turn themselves into ‘a people resembling only itself’ (*tantum sui similis gens*), a characteristic which the author considers positive. Although the Saxons are said to belong to those people who live in a territory the author calls ‘Germania’ (*Germaniam incolentes nationes*), there is no mention of *Germani* and apparently no notion of them as a cohesive ethnic group. The regional and ‘tribal’ specificity of this adaptation differs from those in the fifteenth century and caused no repercussions; for that, very different circumstances were needed.

The rediscovery of the *Germania* and the discovery of the *Germanen*

Four factors were particularly conducive to the ideological impact of the *Germania* in the sixteenth century: the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation was losing its centripetal force, and the notion of a German nation correspondingly became more appealing and integrative. This emerging national consciousness rose further in the confrontation between German electors and the Curia in Rome as well as German and Italian humanists – the former all too aware of their *barbara tellus*, the latter scornful of it.¹² Finally, a classical text of unquestionable authority to humanistic eyes, the *Germania* fulfilled deep desires: the obstinate German search for a national identity in its own right found a past characterised by specific values very different from Roman ones, a past that in present times of instability offered a stable foundation for nation-building. The rediscovery of the *Germania* is tantamount to the discovery of the *Germanen* as the Germans’ forefathers.¹³

This first significant phase of reception and adaptation determined the parameters for usages to come: it set the categories that would inform future

⁹ See above, pp. 245–7.

¹⁰ Meginhart wrote the latter part. Quotations (§§ 1–3) are from the reproduction of Krusch (1933) 423–36.

¹¹ Thus authors copying Rudolf unwittingly passed on Tacitus (see Mertens (2004) 46).

¹² For these issues, see Krebs (2005) 112–16.

¹³ See Joachimsen (1970a) 282 and Muhlack (1989) 138.

reflections on the past; posed the ethnic continuity – from now on mostly unquestioned – between the *Germanen* and the Germans; extrapolated the *Germania*'s implicit antithesis; and finally established the German(ic) virtues, their autochthony and ethnic purity. However, in striving for cultural independence German humanists depended on Italian stimulation.¹⁴

Italian intermediation, provocation and fiction

Although the *Germania* would become a predominantly German affair, Italian intermediation was needed to initiate the reception. At the beginning stood the cardinal and later pope Enea Silvio Piccolomini (1405–64), who in 1457 received a letter in which he was warned of widespread dissatisfaction with curial politics (the *gravamina*) amongst the Germans: they felt pressed for money just as if they were barbarians (*tamquam ... barbaris*), and their country, once so powerful, was now brought low.¹⁵ In response Piccolomini produced an epistolary treatise in three volumes, in which he refuted the charges, lauded curial politics and presented himself as a suitable candidate for the papacy. In the second volume he demonstrated how much, contrary to the German impression, Germany had changed for the better owing to the civilising influence of the Roman church. In his argument the barbaric heathen past was replaced by the civilised Christian present.¹⁶ Among other ancient authorities Tacitus was called upon as the prime witness of a Germanic past in which 'everything was barbaric, wild and bestial' (*omnia ... barbara, ... ferina ac brutalia*).¹⁷ Piccolomini's version of the Germanic past was simply bleak, and positive traits were omitted,¹⁸ so that the subsequent scenery of the abundant present could stand in starkest contrast and the ancient Germans would not recognise their own land. The opportunism of this version is clear from a comparison with the positive image of the German(ic) past which he deployed in an earlier speech in Frankfurt.¹⁹

Piccolomini's impact on German humanism can hardly be exaggerated; he spread humanism in the northern hemisphere and stirred anti-Italian sentiments and anti-papist rancour.²⁰ His provocative account of Germany,

¹⁴ For the reception of the *Germania* in this period, see Ridé (1977).

¹⁵ Picc. *Germ.* 2.4. The original letter is lost (see Krebs (2005) 142 n. 75).

¹⁶ He had already written three letters, similar in argument, different in tone, not mentioning Tacitus.

¹⁷ *Germ.* 2.4. Doubts about his knowledge of the *Germania* are unfounded: see Mertens (2004) 67–71.

¹⁸ The two exceptions are Germanic fortitude and morality; both are, however, qualified and rendered irrelevant.

¹⁹ *Oratio de clade Constantinopolitana et bello contra Turcos congregando*, 1454.

²⁰ See Paparelli (1950) 146–7; Joachimsen (1970b) 342; and Stadtwald (1996) 46.

the title of which clearly addressed German readers, was widely read by German humanists and seems to have brought Tacitus' *Germania* to their attention.²¹ Ironically, it was another Italian who opened a very different perspective on Tacitus' *libellus*: in 1471 Giannantonio Campano (1429–77) was dispatched by Pope Paul II to Regensburg to participate in the Diet, which was held there in order to enlist German military forces for a papal crusade against the Ottoman threat, as announced by the programmatic title.²² As suited his intention, Campano praised German military skill and fortitude, using the *Germania* to evoke a heroic image of the Germanic past, to which the German present should aspire (*facite et Germania Germania sit et eos nunc habeat propugnatores quos olim habuit*). The unacknowledged debts to Tacitus are many;²³ two are of particular importance. Wishing to stress the continuity between past and present, the versatile speaker adduced Germanic autochthony (*semper indigene Germanie hoc in coelo nati*), their purity (*impermixti aliis*) and the fact that their forefathers' way of life was also theirs (*mores, quos vestri maiores ab initio habuere, ad ultimum retinētis*). Secondly, Tacitus' physiognomic description was simply transferred to Campano's contemporaries: they have the same huge bodies (*corpora ... eximia atque extantia*), threatening eyes (*oculos in pugna minaciores*) and terrifying voices (*voces ad perterrefaciendum pleniores*). The Germans were obviously their forefathers' sons; the Germanic past was laudable and imitable. Campano's speech was widely read and welcomed among German humanists, who seem to have come to an appreciation of specific Germanic values only because of Campano's intermediation.²⁴

A fictional account of great, but comparatively short-lived, influence appeared in 1498: the *Antiquitates*, fabricated by the veteran forger Annius of Viterbo (Giovanni Nanni) on the basis of the *Germania* (*inter alia*), but presented by him as fragments of the Chaldean historian Berosus. He added notes, which often contain references to and quotations from those in fact foundational texts. Although its author was soon denounced by Beatus Rhenanus, it remained influential until the late seventeenth century.²⁵

²¹ *De ritu, situ, moribus et condicione Theutonie descriptio* (thus the *editio princeps* of 1496, Leipzig; the much used edition from Basle has 'Germanie'). See Paul (1936) 34–58 for its reception.

²² *In conventu Ratisponensi ad exhortandos principes Germanorum contra Turcos et de laudibus eorum oratio* (it became a classic of its kind: see Paul (1936) 60–5). The printed versions of the *oratio* (by itself: Rome 1487; within the *opera omnia*: Rome 1495) are faulty; I have corrected apparent mistakes in subsequent quotations.

²³ For a collation, see Perret (1950) 151 n. 5.

²⁴ For his role, see Tiedemann (1913) 43.

²⁵ *Commentaria super opera diversorum auctorum de antiquitatibus loquentium* (Rome 1512). For his denunciation as a 'fabulosi auctoris fabulosior interpres', see B. Rhenanus, *Rerum Germanicarum libri tres* (Basle 1551) 39.

German awakening and the durable formation of stereotypes

German humanism at the start was patriotic, occasionally outright chauvinistic; competing with Italian writers in the *res publica litteraria*, it considered fluency in Latin a question of national responsibility and using one's literary skills a moral duty. In this spirit Heinrich Bebel (1472–1518) promoted the mastery of Latin and promised to devote whatever and however little talent and erudition he possessed (knowing, he said, how meagre it was) to defending and praising his *patria*. This pledge showed him to be aware of the rhetorical *topos* of modesty and versed in the classics, since he alluded to Cicero's opening in *Pro Archia poeta*, thus elegantly undermining his own assurance.²⁶ Like Jacob Wimpheling (1450–1528) and many others, he was a 'true lover and defender of his country' (*verus patriae ... amator ac defensor*).²⁷

The most important *amator ac defensor* was Conrad Celtis (1459–1508). In one of German humanism's foundational texts,²⁸ he encouraged the youth to master the Latin language so that, the maligned shortage of German writers remedied, Germans might write their own accounts of Germany. A *Germania illustrata* ('description of Germany') from a German pen was needed to rectify the foreign images of the dimmed present and the blackened past.²⁹ Since their ancestors had tended to be virtuous rather than studious (and German humanists had Sallust, *Cat.* 8.5 in mind), the main obstacle on the way to the past was the lack of evidence; the *Germania* of Tacitus, a foreigner,³⁰ became the highly esteemed guidebook.³¹ The ideological (as distinguished from the merely philological) interest it raised among German humanists can be inferred from the number and distribution of editions: starting with the *editio princeps* in Bologna in 1472, for almost three decades the *Germania* remained an 'Italian' affair (with the exception of Nuremberg in 1476);³² but the appearance of Celtis' edition in 1500 marked

²⁶ *Quicquid et quantulumcumque est in me ingenii ... quod sentio perquam exiguum esse* ('Apologia pro defensione imperatorum contra Leonhardum Justinianum', in Schardius (1673) 108). Cf. Cic. *Arch.* 1. On Bebel's writing and teaching, see Classen (1997).

²⁷ Trithemius' praise of Wimpheling is quoted from Ridé (1977) vol. 2, 304.

²⁸ *Oratio in gymnasio in Ingelstadio publice recitata*, 1492.

²⁹ Celtis attempted such a *Germania illustrata*.

³⁰ The apparent irony that in defending their 'country' against Italian writers they were dependent on a Roman was suspended by differentiating the classical Romans from the contemporary Italians (in the verse of Ulrich von Hutten: *Romanum invenies, hic ubi Roma, nihil*); or it was turned into an asset: a foreigner's praise was particularly valuable, and Tacitus a eulogist à contrecœur.

³¹ To give one example: Heinrich Bebel quotes the following passages from the *Germania* (for the works in which these quotations occur see Krebs (2005) 239 n. 13): 1, 2.1, 2.3, 3.1, 4, 5.2–3, 18.1, 19.1–2, 20.2, 21.2, 22.5, 26.1, 28.2, 28.4, 37, 37.5, 38.1.

³² Since this first German edition did not cause much stir, it may reasonably be conjectured that Piccolomini's *Germania* (cf. n. 21) was needed as a stimulus.

a turning point, and in subsequent decades the *Germania* was printed mostly in German-speaking countries. Over five decades a staggering 6,000 copies may have been produced,³³ supplemented by a German translation (1535 by Jacobus Micyllus), which was the first into a vernacular and was meant to appeal to a broader audience.³⁴

The Tacitean emphasis on Germanic customs and morals was particularly welcome, since the majority of humanists intended history to reveal the morally superior past and teach its readers to embrace lost values. ‘Unser vorfordern warn ander leut’, in the vernacular words of Johannes Aventinus (1477–1534): ‘our forefathers were different’ – better.³⁵ In reaction to the Germanic cultural shortcomings, apparent even to patriotically blinded eyes, their simple life (in contrast to Roman/Italian decadence) and morality were emphasised, and weakness was turned into strength.³⁶ However, the re-evaluation of the German past relied on a second strategy, namely, the demonstration that it was not as primitive as Italians liked to assert (this foreshadowed attempts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to raise the cultural level of the Bronze Age): Celtis’ promotion of the learned Druids, Bebel’s collection of *proverbia* and Jacob Wimpheling’s characterisation of the Germans as supreme inventors and crafters are merely three examples of this endeavour.³⁷ Overnight the ancient Germans became Promethean warriors; and, for centuries to come, disappointing realities would yield to gratifying fiction.

Conrad Celtis, though now mostly forgotten, was celebrated by contemporaries, and later declared the ‘arch-humanist’ and cast as a *völkischer* in the early days of the Nazi regime.³⁸ He supplemented his edition of the *Germania* by hexametric *additiones* (later published as *Germania Generalis*), the two texts revealing the continuity of location, name and morals and the discontinuity of cultural sophistication. Celtis’ use of the *Germania* is representative of his time and formative for later times, which the following anachronisms are intended to anticipate. At the

³³ For the calculation, see Mertens (2004) 61.

³⁴ Johann Eberlin von Günzburg’s translation in 1526 was not printed; the first German translation of **Tacitus**’ complete works would appear more than a century later (1675).

³⁵ See Laurens (1979), esp. 343.

³⁶ See e.g. Celtis, *Oratio* (see n. 28) 66: ‘Ita nos Italicus luxus corruptit ... ut plane sanctius et gratius fuisset nos agere rudi illa et silvestri vita’.

³⁷ See **Krebs** (2005) 200, 237; add *Epitoma rerum Germanicarum Jacobi Wimphelingii Selestadiensis*, in Schardius (1673) 197.

³⁸ For ‘arch-humanist’, originally a term of D. F. Strauss, see Spitz (1957). For the *völkisch* Celtis, see Sponagel (1939). ‘Völkisch’ includes an emphasis on features typical of the German people and their ‘spirit’ and the rejection of other peoples’ influences; no translation is quite accurate.

beginning of his characterisation stood fortitude and indigenoussness (*gens invicta manet ... indigena*). In general, fortitude seemed the most important Germanic characteristic in this period (and parts of *G.* 37 were frequently quoted³⁹), and fellow humanists liked to add that German stamina had sustained the Roman Empire and struggled and faltered only when opposed by Germans fighting on the other side: the bravest Polish officers would be of German blood.⁴⁰ German autochthony was an alternative to the dominant genealogical (Trojan) paradigm and contrasted with the Roman ethnic potpourri: the Germans were no ‘dregs of a people’ (*populi colluvies*) but *rasserein*, racially pure (*sine advenarum mixtura*), and still running through their veins was the blood of their forefathers (*sumus illorum sanguis*),⁴¹ with whom they also shared the Aryan-Nordic racial characteristics: blond hair, bright eyes, and light and well-proportioned limbs. Celtis’ ‘patriotic etymology’ of ‘Germanus’ was one among a standard set, and represented a linguistic interest particularly pronounced in Aventinus’ work and blossoming later in the seventeenth century. When, finally, Heinrich Himmler avowed that ‘one thing can never be excused amongst us Germanen, that is disloyalty’,⁴² he called upon one of the Tacitean virtues (*G.* 6.4, 14.1), copied by Celtis (esp. lines 91–8) and celebrated by German humanists in general: integrity, honesty and righteousness, loyalty, fidelity and spiritedness. Simplicity of mind and circumstances was only hinted at in this poem, and generosity (as expressed in Germanic hospitality) omitted, but both were elaborated elsewhere and are important parts of the Germanic inventory (German *Einfalt*).⁴³

Other long-lasting ideas sprouting at this time, growing over centuries, and blossoming and withering in the twentieth century included the attribution of other peoples’ achievements to the ancient Germans, the idea that noble and outstanding individuals and families were of German, later Aryan, blood (and for some NS readers Tacitus himself would become an Aryan peasant), and that a demographic surplus caused German migrations – this last an explicatory notion that within NS ideology served as a justification of the necessary expansion of *Lebensraum*.⁴⁴

³⁹ So by Bebel (in Schardius (1673) 99) and Wimpfeling (in Schardius (1673) 172).

⁴⁰ Himmler (1974) 27.

⁴¹ For the Trojan genealogy, see Garber (1989). The quotations are from Bebel (in Schardius (1673) 105, 101, 139).

⁴² See Fest (1996) 173.

⁴³ Celtis, *Quattuor libri amorum* 2.9, lines 33, 127–30.

⁴⁴ Webster’s *Dictionary*, s.v.: ‘territory that is held to be necessary for the existence of a state’.

While similarly chauvinistic readings of the *Germania* – like Jacob Wimpheling’s *Epitoma* – were hugely influential, the greatest philologist of his times was hardly heeded: Beatus Rhenanus (1485–1547) stood apart, representing the above mentioned philological reading in this early phase and refusing to sacrifice scholarly conscientiousness on the altar of patriotism. On the contrary, drawing on a comparatively comprehensive historical inquiry and commanding a philological acumen that enabled him to produce the standard edition of ‘Tacitus’ work prior to Justus Lipsius’, he problematised the generally unquestioned assumption of a German(ic) continuity – with wide-ranging consequences: the Swabians could not simply be identified with ‘Tacitus’ *Suebi*, and the past could not simply serve as a foil for the present. He took an equally solitary path when he rejected attempts at attributing to the Germans the achievements of other people.⁴⁵ Needless to say, Rhenanus’ refusal to chime in with his panegyrically inclined fellow humanists made him a lonely figure – no students of his are known.⁴⁶

Languages and mores: the seventeenth century

It is often said that the impact of the *Germania* abates after the stormy first half of the sixteenth century, or, less categorically, that baroque authors adapt this booklet ‘by the most distinguished writer’ (*scriptor eminentissimus*) in much the same way as the humanists had. A cursory survey of the topics they predominantly address with the help of the *Germania* seems to confirm this contention: legends of origin, religion, mores and customs, language and heroes had already been discussed in more or less detail.⁴⁷ Like their humanistic predecessors, baroque authors also felt threatened by an overwhelming foreign culture, and buried their cultural fears in the glorious Germanic past, naturally considered morally superior.⁴⁸

Yet four developments distinguish the seventeenth century. The cultural antagonist was now French rather than Italian: *dramatis personae* like Arminius and other born-again Germanic heroes (*redivivi*) did not recognise their alienated country and could not understand their countrymen who spoke *à la mode*.⁴⁹ The *Germania* was used to sharpen the Germanic,

⁴⁵ Tacitus, *De moribus Germanorum* (Basle 1519) 45–6, quoted in Mertens (2004) 93, and *Rerum Germanicarum libri tres* (Basle 1551) 81.

⁴⁶ The use of the *Germania* in the context of the Reformation does not seem to add anything different. For Rhenanus see also above, p. 249.

⁴⁷ For the topics, see Frenzen (1937). In a forthcoming paper I shall discuss in more detail the little-studied reception of the *Germania* in the seventeenth century.

⁴⁸ See e.g. the *Sinngedichte* by Friedrich von Logau (Breslau 1654) (= von Logau (1984)).

⁴⁹ See J.G. Schottelius, *Friedens-Sieg* (Wolfenbüttel 1648) (= Schottelius (1900)).

sword-wielding warrior in the face of the effeminate French knight, the former a characterisation that led to (what would later be perceived as) the caricature of the *Theatergermane*: wearing a winged helmet, hides, long braided hair, an unclipped beard and a huge sword.⁵⁰ Thirdly, while in the sixteenth century the *Germania* figured mostly in historiographical work, the seventeenth century was marked by a diversification of genres: not only in histories (like the first book of Philippus Cluverius' influential *Germaniae antiquae libri tres*), but also in plays, satires, historical novels and linguistic treatises.⁵¹ The last genre indicates the fourth and most significant novelty of the *Germania* reception in the seventeenth century.

Etymology and occasional assertions of the value of the vernacular reflect the humanists' linguistic awareness, but baroque authors, weary of their contemporaries' *frömdgierigkeit* ('greed for the foreign'), went much further. They organised themselves in language societies, the most famous being the *fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* ('Fruitful Society'), and undertook to purify the German language.⁵² Since 'changes of language are followed by changes of morals', linguistic purification implied ethical elevation (and the production of a dictionary improved the German stamina).⁵³ To baroque ears, German was particularly worthy of protection, as it was widely held to be a pure language, as distinguished from French, 'the child of a whore'.⁵⁴ This Ur-language carried essential meaning (a notion that would be echoed in the twentieth century by Martin Heidegger, who did not have much respect for the French language, either) and provided access to God. In consequence, Tuisto (*G.* 2.2) was not only the Ur-father of the Germanic people and their laws, but also of their Ur-language. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (among many others) famously elaborated this at the beginning of the nineteenth century – with the *Germania* in mind, as we will see.

Montesquieu's *esprit général* and Herder's *Geist der Nation*

In the eighteenth century the *Germania* served to form a set of abiding inter-related ideas: the 'Germanic spirit' (as Houston Stewart Chamberlain would

⁵⁰ E.g. in J.M. Moscherosch, *Gesichte Philanders von Sittewald* (Darmstadt 1964; orig. Strasburg 1640).

⁵¹ Von Lohenstein's monumental novel *Grossmüthiger Feldherr Arminius* (Leipzig 1689–90) must at least be mentioned.

⁵² See Borchardt (1968); Smart (1989).

⁵³ 'Auf die Enderung der Sprache folgt eine Enderung der Sitten' (Schottelius (1900) 50).

⁵⁴ 'Hurenkind': von Logau (1984) 164.

call it a century later), Germanic freedom and the North. One major influential contributor to this discourse was Baron de Montesquieu with his work *L'esprit des lois* (*The Spirit of the Laws*).

Montesquieu knew his Tacitus well – as indicated by slipshod quotations retrieved from memory – and made ample use of his authority. There are fifty-three references (mostly quotations) to the *Germania* alone: ‘a short book’, he writes, but by an author ‘who summarised everything because he saw everything’.⁵⁵ One of the influential concepts he presented, especially in the fourteenth book of his *chef d'oeuvre*, was the theory that a people is formed by its environment (a theory which in fact dated back at least to the fifth century BC but which experienced a renaissance in the eighteenth).⁵⁶ ‘Many things govern men: climate, religion, laws ... mores, and manners; a general spirit is formed as a result’ (19.4). Due to specific Northern circumstances the German *esprit général* was characterised above all by liberty;⁵⁷ studying the origins of the political system in England, which in Montesquieu’s opinion had established liberty by its laws, he refers to the *Germania* (11.22): ‘whoever shall read [this] admirable treatise ..., will find that it is from [the Germans] that the English have borrowed the idea of their political government. This beautiful system was invented first in the woods.’⁵⁸ *Libertas* had been a Germanic hallmark since the fifteenth century, but it was now no longer primarily conceived of as mere independence from the Roman (or any other aggressor’s) Empire – rather, it was seen as the organising principle of the Germanic ‘constitution’. By locating the ‘beautiful system’ in the North, Montesquieu, who believed in the Germanic origin of the French, also changed the traditional semantics of geography: politically, the formerly abhorrent North, hitherto contrasted unfavourably with the superior median, moved from the fringes to the centre.⁵⁹

L'esprit des lois was published in 1748, and its German reception began in 1753 with the translation by A. G. Kästner,⁶⁰ swiftly followed by German adaptations, such as that of F. K. von Moser (*Von dem deutschen National-Geist*, 1765), around which the debate about the national spirit

⁵⁵ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (Cambridge and New York 1989; orig. Geneva 1748) 30.2 (book and chapter); for him as a reader of Tacitus, see Volpilhac-Auger (1985), esp. ch. 6 and 192 (for references to the *Germania*).

⁵⁶ See Fink (1987).

⁵⁷ For a short overview of the debate on the *esprit général*, see Kra (2002).

⁵⁸ This expression (‘in the woods’) would become common currency: see Poliakov (1977) 17–36.

⁵⁹ See Hölzle (1925) for the idea of Germanic liberty before Montesquieu.

⁶⁰ For the reception of Montesquieu in Germany, see Herdmann (1990).

centred.⁶¹ (The translation ‘Geist’ would have an interesting history in its own right, figuring in Hegel’s *Weltgeist*, Arndt’s *Zeitgeist* and Dilthey’s *Geistesgeschichte*.) Montesquieu was also read by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), who slightly modified the former’s anthropo-geographical theory and elaborated the implied notion of a people’s general character, which to him appeared purest in its original form and most fundamentally expressed in a people’s language.⁶² Herder, whose life extended from the dusk of the Enlightenment to the dawn of Romanticism and comprised the *Sturm und Drang* and the German *Klassik*, defies categorisation, and scholarship on him is highly controversial; undoubtedly, however, there are passages that lend themselves facily to nationalistic misinterpretation and appear to anticipate Romanticist and *völkisch* ideas:

A nation can suffer no greater injury than to be robbed of its national character, the peculiarity of its spirit and language ... Look around in Germany for the character of the nation ...; where [is it]? Read **Tacitus**; there you will find its character: ‘The tribes of Germany, who have never degraded themselves by mingling with others, form a peculiar, unadulterated, original nation, which is its own archetype ...’. Now look around and say: ‘The tribes of Germany by mingling with others are degraded.’⁶³

Read in its larger context of Herder’s thought, which was defined by an understanding of history as an organic whole and the higher notion of a common humanity (*Humanität*), this statement loses much of its nationalistic ring. However, in the form of the Romanticist striving for origins and the *völkisch* obsession with the *Volkstum* (national essence) as expressed in folklore art and fairy tales, its core themes, here as elsewhere linked to the *Germania*, would live on through subsequent decades. Even if, as has been suggested, Romanticism commented on Herder’s work with icy silence and no *völkisch* voice mentioned his name, his ideas circulated within the *res publica litteraria*. As Goethe knew, ideas do not have to be transmitted under their author’s name in order to be influential: Herder would be called upon in the context of National Socialism – undeservedly but not fully unreasonably, like many others.

⁶¹ For the ‘Nationalgeist Debatte’, see Vazsonyi (1999).

⁶² *Gedanken bei Lesung Montesquieus* (in *Sämtliche Werke* (Hildesheim 1967–8) vol. 4, 464–8).

⁶³ *Fragmente über die neuere deutsche Literatur*, 1767 (in *Werke* (Frankfurt 1985) vol. 1, 376).

Nationalism, racism and the *völkisch* movement: the nineteenth century

We see the old German nationalism ... after its deepest foundation by Fichte, after its explosive rise through Stein and Arndt. (Alfred Rosenberg)⁶⁴

Writers of the nineteenth century suffered the most from what Ernst Bloch called the ‘Nazification of the past’: Nazis, who read between the lines rather than the text itself, misappropriated them, and critics of fascism followed suit.⁶⁵ Yet the nineteenth century was marked by an unprecedented nationalistic movement and by a systematisation of racism, both of which are detectable in their writing; both would merge into the *völkisch* ideology from which National Socialism would emerge. The ‘Germanomania’ so increased that it earned Heine’s ridicule.

At the turn of the century German consciousness was piqued by the experience of the Napoleonic wars, as is illustrated by the case of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), a student of Kant’s, controversial teacher of several Romantics and figurehead of German idealism. In Berlin under French occupation he delivered fourteen *Addresses to the German Nation* from December 1807 to March 1808, which were received by Prussian ministers, praised by (amongst others) Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Ernst Moritz Arndt and made a considerable impact, not least because of their speaker’s notoriety.⁶⁶ They were meant for ‘the whole German nation’, which he perceived to be ‘threatened by its fusion with foreign people’, and he promised a ‘German national education’ in line with ‘the German national characteristics’, thereby ‘mould[ing] the Germans into a corporate body’ so that this nation could realise its destiny as the ‘regenerator and re-creator of the world’. Even when considered in their larger transnational context, these statements, frequently repeated during the fourteen speeches, hardly lose their nationalistic tone.⁶⁷ As nationally defining characteristics Fichte proposed two: Germans had ‘remained in their original dwelling places’ and ‘retained and developed their original language’.⁶⁸ This, inspired by **Tacitus**, whom he had read during the preparation of his speeches and quoted elsewhere, was subsequently qualified: naturally, Germans had lost their ethnic purity; more important, the speaker added, was the continuity of the German language, which maintained the purity of its ‘spirit’ despite the acceptance of foreign words. The long-established delusion of

⁶⁴ A. Rosenberg, *Mythus* (Munich 1938) 539–41, quoted from Viereck (1961) 48.

⁶⁵ ‘Nazifizierung der Vergangenheit’: E. Bloch, *Politische Messungen* (Frankfurt 1977) 300.

⁶⁶ See Reiss (2006). Accessible and informative, though occasionally inaccurate, is Kelly’s introduction to Fichte (1968).

⁶⁷ See Baumann (2006) for a slightly different position.

⁶⁸ Fichte (1968) 47.

the superiority of the German language⁶⁹ was here emphatically moved into the centre of the nationalistic debate, embedded, as it is, in an idealistic philosophy. Less often noted, but also highly resonant with the *Germania*, were the national virtues that the sixth lecture traced through history, ‘loyalty, uprightness, honour and simplicity’, not to mention the concession of the German ancestors’ comparatively low intellectual achievements, ultimately owed to the fact that their ‘dwellings were scattered’.⁷⁰

Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769–1860), who held Fichte in high esteem, and Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778–1852), who held abstract philosophy in general in low esteem, would also be called upon by National Socialists: Jahn was ‘the natural starting point for every analysis of the concept of *Volk*’, a portrayal so readily and uncritically accepted by post-war historians that Jahn became ‘the first storm trooper’.⁷¹ Both were highly influential – the former primarily as a writer of, for example, *Geist der Zeit* (‘The spirit of times’) and *Das deutsche Vaterland* (‘The German fatherland’), the latter as an agitator, whose organisations, the most famous being the *Turnverein* (‘gymnastic movement’), revolutionised German society. Both had of course read **Tacitus**, the ‘greatest man who ever lived’, and both sounded the familiar nationalistic themes: Jahn’s *Das deutsche Volkstum* (‘The German national essence’) established a concept and its term that would be central in the *völkisch* movement and racism. The beginning of such a racist interpretation can be detected in Arndt’s elaboration of **Tacitus** (G. 4):

The Germans are not *bastardised* ..., they have remained more than many other peoples in their original purity and have been able to develop slowly and quietly from this purity ...; the fortunate Germans are an original people[, as evidenced by] the Roman **Tacitus** ... [H]e saw most clearly how important it was for the future greatness and majesty of the German people that they were pure and resembled only themselves.⁷²

Intimations of racist thinking, defined as an evaluative belief in inherent racial differences and a correlation between biological and cultural / intellectual characteristics that elevate one race to superiority, have been traced back to the Renaissance,⁷³ but the first comprehensive theory appeared in the middle of the nineteenth century: Arthur de Gobineau’s hefty *Essai sur*

⁶⁹ Martyn (1997) gives a stimulating deconstruction of Fichte’s purely ‘German’ words.

⁷⁰ Fichte (1968) 81, 89.

⁷¹ B. Theune, *Volk und Nation bei Jahn, Rotteck, Welcker und Dahlmann* (Berlin 1937) 13, quoted from Viereck (1961) 63, who refers to Jahn as ‘storm trooper’.

⁷² *Fantasia zur Berichtigung der Urteile über künftige deutsche Verfassungen* (orig. 1815), in *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. H. Meisner and R. Geerds (Leipzig, n.d.) pt. 15, 115. Quotation and trans. are taken from Kohn (1949) 791–2, with whose interpretation Vick (2003) should be compared.

⁷³ Mosse (1985).

l'inégalité des races humaines. He posited three races – the black, the yellow and the white – and conceived of history racially: a decrease of racial purity (*bastardisation*) caused cultural decline. The white race was defined as beautiful, honourable and destined to rule; within it the Aryans are ‘cette illustre famille humaine, la plus noble’.⁷⁴ Originally a linguistic term synonymous with Indo-European,⁷⁵ ‘Aryan’ became, not least because of the *Essai*, the designation of a race, which Gobineau specified as ‘la race germanique’. He makes frequent use of the *Germania*, which curiously also figured in the context of the controversial ‘Aryan question’ of whether the Aryan race originated in Asia or in Europe. One of the first advocates of a European cradle – and the authority repeatedly referred to – is Robert Gordon Latham, who pronounced on this question in his ‘The *Germania* of Tacitus with ethnological dissertations and notes’.⁷⁶

Although the *Essai* was translated into German by Ludwig Schemann⁷⁷ and its tenets promulgated by the Gobineau Society, its immediate impact was limited – and yet significant, especially on Houston Stewart Chamberlain. Like Schemann a member of Wagner’s ‘circle at Bayreuth’,⁷⁸ Chamberlain authored the hugely influential *Die Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (*The Foundations of the 19th Century*), which went through thirty editions by 1944. He reconstructed history as a mortal battle between the Germanic and the Jewish race, the latter having ‘established as its guiding principle the purity of the blood’.⁷⁹ Ultimately, he aimed at demonstrating the ‘superiority of the Teuton family’, which would lead to a ‘new, splendid, and light-filled future’ – or such was his utopian hope. Needless to say, Germanic talent was also to be found behind every major cultural achievement. Again, the *Germania* was called upon frequently, especially in the part concerning ‘The entrance of the Germanic people into history’. Chamberlain, who did not hesitate to deviate from the Latin for the sake of emphasis, approvingly commented on Tacitus’ remark about the purity and self-similarity, and praised him for his ‘intuitively accurate observation’.

Since the authenticity of the *Germania* was needed for all these purposes, scholarly work that exposed its realism to doubt drew heavy criticism. Towards the end of the nineteenth century voices could be heard that emphasised its literariness and its author’s ‘creative powers of imagination’.⁸⁰ The

⁷⁴ A. de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (Paris 1853–5) book iii, ch. 1.

⁷⁵ For the *Germania* in the linguistic debate, see F. M. Müller’s *Lectures on the Science of Language* (London 1861). For the ‘Aryan myth’, see Poliakov (1977).

⁷⁶ London 1851, cxlii. For the ‘Aryan question’ see e.g. Vacher de Lapouge (1899) with 332 for the reference to Latham.

⁷⁷ *Versuch über die Ungleichheit der Menschenrassen* (Stuttgart 1898). See Fortier (1967).

⁷⁸ It should at least be mentioned that this circle was a melting pot of *völkisch* ideas.

⁷⁹ I have used the 2nd edn (New York 1912); quotations: vol. 1.253, 1.xlix, and Mosse (1998) 97.

⁸⁰ Baumstark (1875) xiii.

two most important studies, however, appeared after the Great War: Karl Trüdinger revealed **Tacitus'** formal debt to the standardised set of questions and interpretations in the ethnographical tradition, and Eduard Norden demonstrated that various aspects of **Tacitus'** *Germani* could be traced back to other peoples, and spoke of *Wandermotive* ('tralatitious motifs').⁸¹ Norden's monograph met with outrage from *völkisch* readers, so he felt compelled to reassert its historical value in the preface to the second edition.⁸²

The nationalistic *völkisch* movement combined many of the attitudinal tendencies of the first half of the nineteenth century: originality and peasantry, *Volkstum*, racism and anti-Semitism, and *Germanentum* ('Germanicness') were its central characteristics; it culminated during the German Empire (1871–1918), when it was the most important subculture.⁸³ It pervaded German society: its literature (mostly in the form of historical novels like Felix Dahn's *Kampf um Rom*), art and the humanities, especially studies in German language and literature and history, which the pioneer Gustav Kossinna elevated to 'a pre-eminently national science' (*eine hervorragend nationale Wissenschaft*).⁸⁴ It aimed at illuminating and raising the profile of German pre-history, the Bronze Age – just as German humanists had demanded. Needless to say, the *Germania* was once again a cornerstone of the ideological edifice: in 1904 the 'Germanic Bible' (*Germanenbibel*) appeared, soon to reach an edition of 20,000, and introduced by the *libellus*, 'this eulogy'.⁸⁵ A recruitment flyer of the Germanic Order, the umbrella organisation whose political programme was by and large identical with that of the famous Thule Society, warned in apocalyptic tones of the imminent extinction of the 'blond heroic race', wistfully evoking the times 'in which the Roman **Tacitus** still spoke of the old Germans as racially pure'. In their message for *Germanen* they pleaded for a systematic 'breeding to former heights' (*Wiederhochzüchtung*);⁸⁶ NS eugenicists would heed their call.

'Thus shall we be again': National Socialist readings of the *Germania*

In a melodramatic scene, duly photographed and publicised, Hitler visited the bedridden Chamberlain and kissed his hands. The encounter of a leading

⁸¹ Trüdinger (1918); and Norden (1920), esp. 54.

⁸² For reactions to Norden's *Urgeschichte*, see Canfora (1979) 38–42.

⁸³ The classic study is Mosse (1998).

⁸⁴ G. Kossinna, *Die deutsche Vorgeschichte: eine hervorragend nationale Wissenschaft* (2nd edn, Würzburg 1914).

⁸⁵ W. Schwane (ed.), *Germanen-Bibel* (6th edn, Berlin and Stuttgart 1934); quotation from the preface to the 4th edn.

⁸⁶ The flyer is printed in Rose (1994) 90–1.

figure in the *völkisch* movement and the leader of the NSDAP represents the relationship between the two ideologies: 'National Socialism was a *Völkisch* movement'.⁸⁷ Yet NS ideology, as embraced by its leaders, was far from monolithic, and there were always discordant voices: Hermann Göring (the field marshal of the air force and later Hitler's official successor) privately discarded it as 'junk'; and Hitler felt compelled to contain the widespread Germanic element in his party (though he had considered 'Germanic Revolution' as a title for *Mein Kampf*).⁸⁸ Among the NS leadership, Heinrich Himmler, who upon reading the *Germania* in his youth vowed 'thus shall we be again', stands apart as a genuine believer and powerful promoter of the Germanic cause, joined only by his intermittent rival Alfred Rosenberg (the chief ideologue of the NSDAP).⁸⁹ While not representative of Hitler's highest-ranking paladins, the *Reichsführer SS* embodies a mainstream trend within NS culture, of which the party apparatus, despite its leader's hesitations, took advantage so that at the party convention in 1936 in Nuremberg a 'Germanic room' (*Germanenraum*) was decorated with Tacitean quotations.⁹⁰ And when Cardinal Michael von Faulhaber in his New Year's Address in 1933 followed in the footsteps of Enea Silvio Piccolomini and used the *Germania* as evidence of Germanic barbarism, his speech was burned by members of the Hitler Youth, and two shots were fired on his residence.

For many NS foot soldiers the *Germania* was a 'bible', and the election in 1933 was considered a promise that the Germanic element would be valued more highly than ever before.⁹¹ It figured in numerous doctrinaire articles in ideological journals like the SS' 'The Black Corps' (*Das Schwarze Korps*), 'National Socialist Education' (*Nationalsozialistisches Bildungswesen*) and 'The National Socialist Monthly' (*Das Nationalsozialistische Monatsheft*). Ultimately, it also lay behind the Nuremberg race laws, Himmler's SS and Walther Darré's concept of 'blood and soil' (*Blut und Boden*).

One Nuremberg race law, passed in 1935, forbade marriages between Jews and Germans 'out of the deep conviction that the purity of the German blood is the prerequisite of the survival of the German people'. A few days earlier, Hans F. K. Günther (1891–1968), the NS 'expert' on questions of race, had been honoured for having established 'the spiritual basis for ... the legislation of the National Socialist state'.⁹² Günther was a fervent

⁸⁷ Mosse (1998) v. 'NSDAP' is the acronym of *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* ('National Socialist German Workers' Party').

⁸⁸ For 'junk', see Fest (1996) 105; for the discarded title, see W. Maser, *Adolf Hitler. Mein Kampf* (6th edn, Esslingen 1981) 160 (photo 6).

⁸⁹ Bundesarchiv Koblenz, NL Himmler, N 1126/9, no. 218.

⁹⁰ For the Germanic room, see *Germanenerbe* 1 (1936) 194.

⁹¹ Benze (1936) 20; H. Schneider, in *Forschungen u. Fortschritte* 15 (1939) 1–3.

⁹² Quoted from E. Weisenburger, in M. Kissener and J. Scholtzseck (eds.), *NS-Biographien aus Baden und Württemberg* (Konstanz 1997) 162, 188–9.

admirer of the Nordic race and an advocate of ‘breeding to former heights’ (*Wiederhochzüchtung*) of Nordic purity. ‘A race’, in Günther’s often-quoted definition, ‘manifests itself in a group of people that through a specific combination of characteristics of the body and the soul differs from any other group and produces always and only those like itself.’ The last characteristic, the reproduction of identity, was an audible echo of **Tacitus** ‘resembling only itself’ (G. 4), which Günther quoted frequently. In his view, **Tacitus** *Germani* had practised what he advanced: selection and eradication in the name of racial purity. The third chapter of his ‘Origin and racial history of the *Germanen*’ was entitled ‘The Germanic care of race and the health of their [genetic] heritage’. When he discussed the various measures undertaken by the Germanic tribes for the sake of their genetic health, he mentioned **Tacitus**’ description of crimes and punishment (G. 12.1), and then elaborated on ‘how the *Germanen* hung up or drowned in the marshes those who were inferior or predisposed to perversion’ (homosexuals, in Günther’s opinion). He concluded that this practice guaranteed a continuous purification of the people, ‘since the genes of those people would not be passed on to future generations’.⁹³ To his eyes, **Tacitus**’ *Germani* practised NS euthanasia. In another instance of NS misappropriation the *Germanen* forbade ‘mixed marriages’ in an effort to retain their racial purity – in the same way as the NS legislation took measures to prohibit ‘mixed marriages’ between Jews and Germans. One avid NS reader of the *Germania* considered the laws concerning the ‘Jewish question’ as the most recent effort to restore the racial purity mentioned in the fourth chapter.⁹⁴

Another fervent reader was Himmler, who embraced Günther’s Nordic ideals and followed him in his interpretation of the punishment of homosexuals in one of his secret speeches for members of his SS. He had vowed to resuscitate Germanic virtues and lifestyle, and within his SS he tried to live up to his word. It presented itself as an elite of ‘German men of Nordic determination selected on special criteria’, all but one of which were the Tacitean virtues: racial purity, will to freedom and bravery, loyalty (often including camaraderie) and honour, and obedience.⁹⁵ Before a young man entered this ‘new nobility’, he would have been a member of the Hitler Youth, where he was indoctrinated with the help of manuals like ‘The followers – the Germanic combat unit’.⁹⁶ For this doctrinaire collection of passages

⁹³ H.F.K. Günther, *Herkunft und Rassengeschichte der Germanen* (Munich 1937) 148–9.

⁹⁴ M. Schlossarek, *Die Taciteische Germania als Kündlerin eines urdeutschen Heroismus* (Breslau 1935) 18–19.

⁹⁵ H. Himmler, *Die Schutzstaffel als antibolschewistische Kampforganisation* (München 1936) 20–4.

⁹⁶ H. Wagenführ, *Gefolgschaft – Der germanische Kampfbund* (Hamburg 1935).

concerning Germany and the Germans the *Germania* supplies the motto: 'It is the greatest honour ... to be ... surrounded by a huge band of chosen young men' (cf. *G.* 13.3). Towards its end the adolescent learns about 'combat honour and courage of the followers' from a rather literal translation of two Tacitean paragraphs (*G.* 13–14), noteworthy for its adjustment to Nazi jargon, but above all for its dark resonance with the cult of the *Führer*. The translation relates how the Germanic forebear would fall in with the followers of the leader, competing with the others for the place of honour at the *Führer's* side (the Latin is *princeps*, *G.* 13.2). In Himmler's SS the entering 'followers' had to swear: 'We swear by you, Adolf Hitler, *Führer* and chancellor of the German Reich, loyalty and fortitude.' Germanic loyalty (along with other Germanic virtues) also figured prominently in school texts: 'never will the German people perish as long as this manly loyalty persists ... [I]s not the *Führer* also surrounded by a loyal following? ... These German compatriots embody Germanic loyalty and heroic spirit and are your shining examples.'⁹⁷ Tacitus' description of Germanic loyalty (*G.* 13–14.1) is the most quoted in NS discussions of Germanic values, second only to that of the Germanic race's purity and physiognomic characteristics (*G.* 4).

Walther Darré (1895–1953), appointed by Himmler, served as director of the 'SS office of race and settlement', which was responsible for preserving and increasing the purity of the Aryan race and the acquisition of *Lebensraum* and its Germanisation. He had established himself with a number of *völkisch* books, one of them being *New Nobility from Blood and Soil* (*Neuadel aus Blut und Boden*), published in 1930. Contemporaries characterised National Socialism as the 'ideology of blood and soil', and Darré promoted it throughout his career. Stripped of its mystical embroidery, it deployed an antithesis between the city and the land to elevate the countryside as the place of the Nordic race's health, morals and genuineness. According to that view, farming was not just work, it was the lifestyle of endurance, seriousness and responsibility, as opposed to the uprooted existence of the city *flâneur*. Summing up his doctrine of blood and soil, Darré spoke of the countryside as the 'bloodstream of the people' and source of rejuvenation of the Nordic race.⁹⁸

The metaphorical language, such as the 'stream of blood', the *Volkskörper* (literally, 'the body of the people', not quite corresponding to the 'body politic'), and the notion of the people as an organism, lent itself to a more fanciful and mystical elaboration and fuses with the Tacitean myth of Germanic

⁹⁷ C. Schütte and O. Gaede, *Geschichtsbuch für die Jugend des Dritten Reiches* (2nd edn, Halle 1934), esp. 3, 10–16 (quotation from p. 14).

⁹⁸ 'Ideology': *NS Bildungswesen* 1 (1936) 16. Darré, *Um Blut und Boden* (5th edn, München 1942) 180.

indigenoussness. When Darré wrote that it was the ‘farms and estates where the body of the people penetrates the home soil [*Heimatboden*] with its roots’, the metaphorical expressions are easily associated with the Tuisto-myth (G. 2.2). Darré, though intimately familiar with the Roman historian’s little book, does not seem to have embraced this myth. Others, however, did: one of the many translators and editors of the *Germania* in the 1930s inserts the NS doctrine in the title: ‘**Tacitus**: Germania. Of blood and soil, mores and customs in the Germanic sphere’, and later, in his annotations to the fourth chapter, states that ‘race and soil formed the Germanic man, blood and soil are the roots that supply him with strength’. And drawing a direct line between the 2,000-year-old text and the politics of the NS regime, the prophet of ‘new heroism’ supplied his comments on the myth of Tuisto: ‘from the beginnings, the German[ic] people drew its strength from the soil, and it is no wonder that in the new Germany, the Third Reich, the peasantry, lovers of the clod, are the most important basis of the people’.⁹⁹

More than anybody else, Himmler believed in the ideas that had been developed over centuries with the help of **Tacitus’** *Germania*. It seems only natural that in 1943 he authorised a special SS mission to Italy to retrieve its oldest extant manuscript, the *codex Aesinas*; but to no avail.¹⁰⁰ It did not matter: the most dangerous book had done its damage already.¹⁰¹

FURTHER READING

Studies of the reception of the *Germania* have been limited to specific epochs:¹⁰² Lund (1995) has documented its relevance within the context of NS ideology; Canfora (1979) has focused on the German Empire, and Krapf (1979), Mertens (2004) and **Krebs** (2005) have looked at its use by Italian and German humanists. Study of these works brings to light a recurrent set of ideas and notions drawn from the *Germania* and coherently developed over the centuries, often within the (interchanging) discourses of *Germanentum*, the myth of the Aryan race and the simple original life. Intellectual histories of these discourses have been written by Mosse (1998), Poliakov (1977), Ridé (1977) and von See (1986), all of whom repeatedly point to the importance of **Tacitus’** *libellus*.

⁹⁹ J. Weisweiler, **Tacitus**: *Germania. Von Blut und Boden, Sitte und Brauch im germanischen Raum* (Bielefeld – Leipzig, ca. 1936), 8–9 and n. 40; Schlossarek (as in n. 94) 10.

¹⁰⁰ For this episode, see Schama (1995) 75–81.

¹⁰¹ For **Tacitus’** *Germania* as the most dangerous book, see **Krebs** (forthcoming).

¹⁰² Von Stackelberg (1960) is not particularly concerned with the *Germania*.