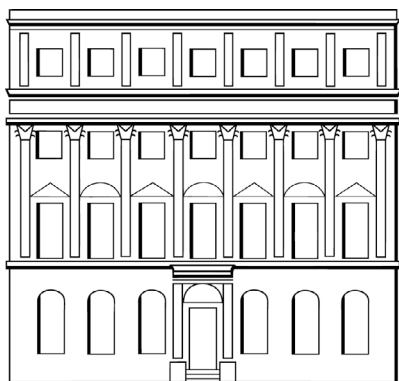


# German Historical Institute London

## Annual Lectures



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London

**THE 1991 ANNUAL LECTURE**

Confronting Clio:  
Myth-Makers and Other Historians

by  
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A common reaction to the dramatic events of 1989, among both the German and the international public, was to claim that history had 'caught up' with Germany and the countries of eastern central Europe. At first sight this expression, implying that history can be 'overtaken' or 'left behind', seems rather strange. But it does make an important point. After 1945, and especially in Germany, both East and West, the past was frequently invoked. It was often said that we must learn the lessons of the past. People seemed to believe that with enough good will such lessons could in fact be learned, that we can 'liberate' ourselves from history, and that future history can therefore be 'made' in the light of previous historical experience. The idea that history has something to do with destiny, or in other words, that history has a momentum of its own, receded into the background. The individuality of peoples was not yet described in terms such as those in which Goethe tried to capture the essence of individuality, writing of a 'characteristic form which, living, develops – this is how you must be, you cannot escape from yourself'.

In 1989 history, whose part in rational calculations and sober advance planning had shrunk, made a sudden come-back. But what does 'history' mean? More precisely, in what form and through what agencies does it affect people, determining their thinking and behaviour, thus becoming a factor which shapes the future and, in turn, itself influences history to come?

A few years ago the *Historikerstreit*<sup>1</sup> was raging in the German press. This historians' dispute also made the pages of some non-German newspapers, where it was reported with interest and occasional passion. Even in retrospect the main issues cannot be summed up in a few words. None of the participants could seriously be accused of trying to relativize the atrocities of the Nazi

regime. Nor were they attempting a fundamental re-evaluation of the regime and its twelve-year period of rule. Martin Broszat, who has since died, was at the time Director of the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich, and the author of an urgent appeal to historians not to allow an excessive emphasis on the uniqueness and exceptional character of the Third Reich to obstruct real historical understanding and the deeper insights it can provide. And nobody could suspect Martin Broszat of harbouring apologetic intentions.

It is clear, however, that both sides – some members of each claiming the moral high ground – were concerned with the basic assumptions of German history. They were interested in ways of dealing with the past, and in the conclusions that could be drawn from it. One thing seemed quite obvious, and was accepted unquestioningly by large sections of the public: the Germans' view of their history was shaped by historians. They were the ones who made sense of the past. It was believed that the nation's understanding and view of its history depended crucially on them, and this was seen as the special responsibility of historians.

The events of autumn 1989, however, dealt this notion a serious blow – although not all historians have yet admitted it. Whether positive or critical, historians used to relate history to existing conditions, to the given order. They had explained the present in terms of the past in an extremely clear-cut and unambiguous – not to say linear – way. And they had frequently pointed out that in remembering more positive traditions we should not forget the shadows cast by the past. Now, however, history suddenly left its seemingly clearly prescribed, historically explicable path. It had 'turned the corner', as Theodor Mommsen once said of the events of 1866.

In other words, history no longer followed the paths

mapped out by professional observers. But history, or rather, historical continuity and a historical orientation, were still forces to be reckoned with. Indeed, the administrators of the historical past were not prepared for the scale and power of these forces. In the cry 'Wir sind ein Volk' ('We are one people'), the historical past intruded into the present and the future in a way which upset all views of what was historically still potent, and what was already extinct. As one of our younger journalists has pointed out, it could be said that 'history has invaded historiography', and not only in a metaphorical sense.<sup>2</sup>

But what were the roots of this process? On what was it founded? What factors, obviously underestimated by academic historians, had affected the perception of many Germans of their place in history and had thus, under these circumstances, had a direct impact upon the historical process?

At the time of Germany's political unification, in the late summer and autumn of 1990, an exhibition about Otto von Bismarck was held in Berlin.<sup>3</sup> It was prepared and mounted by professional historians, and attracted a great deal of attention both in Germany and abroad. The exhibition concentrated on the period when Bismarck was most active, on his role as a Prussian and a European statesman, and in particular, on the unification of Germany which is associated with his name. This last factor made the exhibition more topical than anybody could have foreseen. The whole world noted with satisfaction the coolness with which the exhibition treated Bismarck's unification of Germany, especially the methods by which it had been achieved and which today seem dubious. The exhibition also distanced itself from the problems which Bismarck's unification of Germany had created for the future, and from the excessive feeling of national self-confidence derived from it. In 1990 it was an entirely

different matter – that was the message of the exhibition. And this was not only the view of the organizers and those responsible for the exhibition – it seems that it was really so. According to many foreign observers the mood on 3 October 1990 was rather muted, quite unlike that of the celebrations at the foundation of the Reich in 1871.

This historically distanced exhibition, which emphasized the elements of discontinuity, contained a sort of exhibition within an exhibition. Housed in a circular corridor running around the central exhibition hall, it exerted a special fascination, particularly on foreign visitors. This section touched upon a question operating at a different level, but one which, in a dialogue reaching across the centuries, most directly addressed the really topical issue: what was it that had come into being, with such far-reaching consequences, in eastern Germany, and what could still come of it? In an allusion to Friedrich Schiller, this section was entitled 'Der Deutschen Seelen-suche' (the Germans' soul-searching). Using painting as an example, it showed how Germans in the nineteenth century tried to arrive at an understanding of themselves through history, by seeking an identity that made sense of their actions and defined their place in the world.

Much of what, for Germans as well as most of the rest of world, typifies and symbolizes 'Germanness', was jumbled together here: the Marienburg and Luther, the graves of Germanic heroes and Father Rhine, the Lorelei and the Nibelungen legend, Siegfried and Walhalla and, finally, Germania herself in all her shapes from an angel of peace to a blazing goddess of war. All this was far removed from the ideal of the 'new German' – the model democrat, always under control, arguing and behaving rationally, and constantly trying to come to terms with a disastrous past. But it touched living roots, and the fact that their continuing vitality had been overlooked was one reason

why so many people were taken by surprise by what happened.

The Germans' attempt to make sense of their history after the dissolution of the old social and political order connected with the Holy Roman Empire, that is, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, was expressed here in definite processes, images, ideas and traditions, from which it also drew support. They represent a specific and characteristic selection from a huge potential stock, whose internal consistency – which many academic disciplines are still labouring to establish – is of only secondary importance, if not totally irrelevant here. From the point of view of historical continuity and context, therefore, they are mere fragments. However – and this is also true of them in other combinations – they add up to a specific meaning, even if in scholarly terms it is largely untenable, and in many respects hardly rational. What Karl Kerényi has called the 'Urphänomen Mythos' (myth as a proto-phenomenon) provides the raw material for this process. In other words, it is a 're-working of reality', concentrating on certain people and processes. According to Kerényi, the 'essence of myth' is that it is an 'incomplete re-working of reality'.<sup>4</sup>

These specific manifestations of what could also be called a sensory perception of historical reality often take the shape of supra-individual, collective mentalities and identities. In one of his main works the Heidelberg psychologist and philosopher Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) investigated the essence of European folk myths on the basis of his knowledge derived from experimental individual psychology. Significantly enough, he called this work *Völkerpsychologie* (the psychology of peoples).<sup>5</sup> In the 'combination of myth, history and poetry', that is, in the perception, interpretation and re-working of history, he too sees a force comparable only to religion at work. It



helps people make sense of the world and reinforces their image of self. As in the heroic legends which were Wundt's main subject, the 'hard core' or the raw material of folk myth is in most cases provided by a 'historical figure which evokes some sort of memories ... or ... a historical event which long reverberates through tradition'.<sup>6</sup> New inventions and accretions, re-interpretations and above all the heroic figures themselves, who move farther and farther away from the real events, give rise to a range of meanings which cluster around the historical core, creating the myth which constitutes the historical view of self and the collective memory.

'The figures of myth', as the Italian writer Roberto Calasso has recently put it, 'live many lives and suffer many deaths, unlike fictional characters [or those who figure in historical accounts], who are always bound to a single plot. But in every one of these lives and deaths, all the others are simultaneously present, they resonate through every one.'<sup>7</sup>

Certainly no-one was more aware of the context in which myth is created, the mechanisms by which it comes into being, and the continuing need for it in the modern world, than Richard Wagner. At one of the highest points of the 'Germans' soul-searching' it was he who described, promoted, and exploited this situation to the full. Wagner and the extraordinary influence he exerted, far beyond the opera-going public, as well as the impact of the selection of images and pictorial motifs collected at the Bismarck exhibition, illustrate the extent to which, even in the modern world, history is gaining vitality through the specific 're-working of reality' offered by myth. Wagner himself, seeking suitable material with the widest possible appeal, studied the underlying contexts and processes in great detail. When he first began work on the Nibelungen saga, in the summer of 1848, Wagner noted: 'Mere history

alone seldom provides sufficient material – and it is always incomplete – for us to assess the innermost (as it were, instinctive) motives for the restless thrusting and striving of whole races and peoples. We must look for this in religion and legend where, in most cases, we are pretty sure to find it.’<sup>8</sup> ‘Religion and legend’, he explained, clearly following the Romantic tradition, ‘are the successful productions of popular views of the essence of things and people.’<sup>9</sup> The people has ‘always possessed an inimitable ability to perceive its own nature in generic terms and to imagine it clearly personified’. A century before Kerényi, Wagner pointed out that this was never something complete and fixed for all time, but – and this reveals the creative artist at work, in other words, the intrusion of Wagner’s own role – a process that was constantly renewing itself and producing new results. The ‘gods and heroes’ of ‘religion and legend’, Wagner pointed out, were ‘the tangible personalities in which the folk spirit manifests its essence’. He claimed that they were not merely figures from the past, but part of a living present and future, because ‘for all the individuality of these figures, their substance is ... of the most general, comprehensive nature, which gives them an unusually persistent vitality. Every new direction which the folk spirit takes imperceptibly communicates itself to them, and they are always capable of reflecting it.’<sup>10</sup> In myth, history as a whole is constantly realizing itself anew as the history of a people and of humanity. Thus, suggests Wagner, myth continually throws light on the present at any given time. As Carl Dahlhaus once pointedly put it, for Wagner the ‘essence’ of the present, from the point of view of the stage, the theatre, and the artwork of the future, was ‘nothing more’ than that ‘in it, the meaning of a piece of history becomes clear’.<sup>11</sup>

In brief, the scholarly, that is, the chronological and

systematic view of history explains, while historical myth creates meanings. And it is only the latter, so the argument runs, that gives history vitality. In fact, it becomes indispensable because it gives peoples, especially when they are politically as divided as the Germans, the chance to make sense of themselves.

If we discard Romantic terms such as 'folk spirit', 'folk soul' and so on, then what remains is the description of a mechanism for appropriating the historical past that functions in a highly selective and arbitrary way. And it seems that in the modern world, despite all the advances and achievements of historiography, this mechanism is what gives the vast majority of people their highly characteristic view of history.

This claim seems quite plausible if we look at the tenacious national myths of various peoples, and at the role played in these myths by figures such as Charlemagne, Barbarossa, Joan of Arc, Luther, Wallenstein, Napoleon and John F. Kennedy, and key events such as the Battle of Bouvines, Luther's nailing of the theses to the church doors in Wittenberg, the Glorious Revolution of 1689 in England, and the revolution of 1789 in France.<sup>12</sup> But can this claim really be substantiated? Above all, can its significance for the current self-image of individual nations be demonstrated? Or is the view that historical myth has historical significance itself no more than a myth?

I shall begin with an observation that at first sight seems purely formal. All national history, whether it is based upon 'scientific' principles or, in important respects draws upon 'pre-scientific', that is, mythical elements, treats its subject, the nation, as a collective individual.<sup>13</sup> Thus it tends to follow the pattern of individual biography. There is often a tendency to see the development of a nation as paralleling the life of an individual – a trend which, it seems, is as old as an interest in history itself. We can

identify four main constants: first, the significance of *origins*; secondly, the logical and emotional demand for *continuity*, in other words, for a rational and thus, in this context, 'reasonable', coherent development; thirdly, nostalgic questions concerning this development, about what would have happened if ..., about *missed opportunities*, about *crucial forks* in the road, about deviations from the high road which, from the perspective of the present, seems the right one; and fourthly, the issue of the *specific character of individual nations*, their *special aptitudes and talents*, their *achievements* as well as their characteristic *failings* and *weaknesses* in the face of specific challenges and situations.

If we look at German history from *this* point of view, without distinguishing between 'scientific' and 'pre-scientific' or mythical ideas and approaches, but merely attempt to arrange individual factors and various patterns of interpretation within this framework, we are left with the pieces of a kaleidoscope. Every turn of the kaleidoscope produces quite specific patterns which are characteristic of any given time. As far as origins are concerned, we can distinguish three major derivations and roots: Greek and Roman Antiquity, Western Christianity, and the Germanic world. It is characteristic of Germany that more or less from the start, it has never had a standard origin myth. Germans have always identified various elements to which they owe their national character, their individuality and identity, but they have valued them differently. The German humanists of the sixteenth century picked up Tacitus's *Germania*, and while this has not been forgotten, it has never become a dominant tradition. Apart from the Germanic tribes, the Romans and especially the Greeks have always been important, and despite the progressive secularization of all areas of life, the Christian heritage seems still to be a central, identity-

creating force for the German nation. Its significance, which was temporarily pushed into the background under the influence of anticlericalism and the *Kulturkampf*, is in many respects being rediscovered and re-affirmed by *Alltagsgeschichte*, the history of everyday life.

The variety and heterogeneity of perceived origins and traditions also meant that at any given point in time an extraordinary range of interpretations was available in addressing the question of the continuity of national development and binding traditions. In other words, the lack of the formative power of a standard origin myth and of the canon of binding traditions derived from such a myth meant that the influence of the present in interpreting the past grew stronger. In order to avoid the threat to identity which any rapid switch in lines of continuity posed, there was a growing tendency to eliminate as quickly and completely as possible anything that did not fit into the new interpretation. In the bright light of the nineteenth century several examples stand out – for instance, the way in which attempts were made to cast off the traditions of the supra-national Holy Roman Empire, which had shaped German history for almost a thousand years. Another example occurs during the last third of the nineteenth century, when attempts were made to discard the memory of the German Confederation, and of Austria's role in German history. It seems to me that there is a clear parallel here with the case of an individual who is insecure about his or her past and its connection with his or her present identity.

Connected with this emphasis on the idea of continuity is the special weight given to the issue of other possible continuities, other possible courses which the historical process may have taken, of forks in the path and alternatives within the framework of German history. Speculation of this sort nourished a number of movements: the

romanticization of the Middle Ages and the Holy Roman Empire; appeals to the traditions of the Christian West; the rise of legends surrounding Barbarossa, Frederick II of the House of Hohenstaufen, and Wallenstein as personal symbols of other possible paths; discussion of the chances missed in 1848, 1918, and 1945; the various *Sonderweg* debates; and nostalgia for the German Confederation. Perhaps the most recent example is the attempt to idealize the GDR in retrospect as a experiment intended to lead to a brighter future.<sup>14</sup>

It is clear that at least as far as the last two hundred years are concerned, this is the area which is most conducive to historical myth-making. The unreal question, 'what would have happened if ...', produces the equally unreal response that *this* is how it should have been according to the correct tradition, which is then defined. But the myth thus created has a chance to gain real significance only if it subsequently merges with new ideas of continuity which relate to the present – for example, when the old idea of the Reich combines with that of Bismarck's new one after 1871; when the myth of Barbarossa is applied to William I;<sup>15</sup> when Frederick II of the House of Hohenstaufen is seen as a symbol of the connection between charisma and modern rationality; when National Socialism is presented as the heir and consummation of the old Prussian tradition, as on the infamous Day of Potsdam in March 1933; and when the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949 is seen as the culmination of the legacy of 1848 and 1918 without their negative connotations.

Such notions of continuity, orientated towards the present, have always drawn upon national history. Like the Germans' own understanding of their history, German national historiography, based on the tenacious myth of the Reich, has repeatedly fallen under the spell of a

seemingly continuous, almost all-powerful tradition, despite the fact that nation-building was not a continuous process, either constitutionally or in terms of social structure: 'From the start the Reich was something quite independent and unlike anything else. It was burdened with expectations which the reality of the state could never quite live up to. Always more a myth than a legal entity, it left space for all possible interpretations and meanings.'<sup>16</sup> While the idea of the *translatio imperii*, the transmission of the Byzantine emperorship to the Frankish kings was by no means undisputed, the appeal to the *sacerdotium*, the divine mission which had fallen to the Reich with the unification of the Christian West and the need to defend it against unbelievers, formed the heart of the myth which the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation embodied, at least in name, right up to the very threshold of modernity.

During the second Kaiserreich it was not just the aristocratic ruling élite around William II which drew upon the old myth of the Reich. The idea of a German mission and a cult of the Germanic, transmitted to the whole nation from the monarch at the top, appealed to a broad public and stirred the ambitions of much of the Wilhelmine *Bürgertum*. The cult of the ruler which, like the myth-making around the two Bonapartes in France – Napoléon le Grand and Napoléon III as the 'people's emperor' – can only partly be explained by the Caesarist nature of the regime, also revealed the widespread desire for a revival of personal rule and heroism at a time when the bureaucratic-administrative apparatus was being perfected: 'From the medieval emperors to Hitler, including even Hindenburg, the "Reich" cannot be understood without this quasi mythical figure at the top.'<sup>17</sup> The Nazis, finally, made the myth of the Reich the keystone of an ideology which closely bound together the *Volk*, a state Party, and the

*Führer*. In the idea of a *Volksgemeinschaft* ('national folk community') rooted in the Germanic world, myth provided the legitimating foundation for a regime which was aggressive both at home and abroad. In a situation where at least some areas of reality were far removed from this myth, it was permanently invoked.<sup>18</sup> Kettenacker believes that the promise of a renewal of the splendour of the Reich helps explain Hitler's success among the younger generation in particular. The vague hopes and ideas associated with an allegedly Germanic origin myth were expressed by a Munich journalist in an opinion poll held a few years before Hitler's accession to power. For Fritz Blüchner, editor-in-chief of the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, the Reich represented 'the magnificent, wistful thought – lost in its own magnificence and filled with the profound mysticism of its origin – of a marriage between the Germanic and the Christian traditions'.<sup>19</sup>

Thus in the creation of historical myth, desires and realities come together, over large or small gaps in time, in a specific and highly informative way. But the really central and eloquent feature is that myth-making itself remains tied to certain basic facts and situations. How is this raw material created? Certainly not mainly by historians. Ever since the beginning of 'scientific' historiography, that is, for about two hundred years, historians have always been late-comers, evaluating sources, classifying events and above all, providing a corrective to views that have become established. Historiography, therefore, is in many ways tied to what already exists, to previously held opinions and assessments as well as prejudices – even in cases where it radically questions them. The framework and interpretative horizon is always already there, and it can never be completely swept away, at least, not at the first attempt. In fact, historiography that tries too hard to do without it will have little impact and find little re-



sponse – we need only think of *großdeutsche* and Catholic historiography after 1871.

Thus the core of reality which lies at the heart of historical myth, which constitutes its significance and allows it to be effective, is not created by historiography, or more generally, by the application of methodical and systematic thinking to the historical process. This means that myths are vehicles for elements of a reality which seemingly reflects an experience of the world which has not yet been reshaped and rationalized in line with later insights. In this respect myths are closer to the original context, which of course has less to do with factual reality than with assessments and evaluations of situations and relationships, views and interpretations of the world, and mentalities. Reality that is mediated in this way, whose essence is determined by the structure of human experience, contains more 'meaning' from the start than endless lists of facts, however precise, whose relation to the present time, the present individual and the present nation remains rather doubtful. This perhaps explains why a public which, in general, has little use for history, does not see the significance of obviously important processes or crucial events until they are related to comparable processes and events in history. Thus the long-term assessment of the revolutionary events of 1989 in central and eastern Europe and of August 1991 in the Soviet Union will to a large extent depend on how they are linked with the revolutions of 1689, 1776, 1789 and 1848, just as the October Revolution of 1917 essentially owes its status as a historical myth to a comparison with the French Revolution of 1789.

What conclusions can we draw? History as a rational, coherent continuum, which is susceptible of ever more detailed investigation and at the same time creates, even defines, identity exists as a verbal construct only among

philosophers of history and professional historians who, time and again, are plagued by doubts.<sup>20</sup> For everyone else history continues to be a number of stories which do not really add up. They can be combined in almost infinite ways, and each can be interpreted in many different ways. In national history, these stories relate to the nation as something like a collective individual. They of course include historical experiences, patterns of behaviour, motives, ideas and ideals. As in a type of chemical reaction, they can be activated and set in motion under certain conditions and circumstances. In combination with other elements, they may produce completely new, and sometimes highly explosive, mixtures. In retrospect, this can often be rationally reconstructed with a greater or lesser degree of clarity. But it can never be calculated in advance. Unlike chemical reactions, it seems, these combinations follow no recognizable rules. The historian, therefore, should beware of playing the part of a prophet. However, their elements can be studied, allowing something to be said about the range of possible combinations. As far as German history or rather, histories, are concerned, the range is extremely – some will say shockingly – large. In 1945 or 1949, a taboo was placed on many ideas, such as that a nation is more than a national group living under a certain political and social constitution, and that the nation rather than the state represents the fundamental unit of the historical process, and is its real driving force, going far beyond politics in the narrow sense. We will have to wait and see which of these taboos were lifted in 1989-90, and which stories will, in future, determine German history, perhaps leading it along completely different paths.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> On this cf. "Historikerstreit". *Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung*, 3rd edn (Munich, 1987); Uwe Backes, Eckhard Jesse and Rainer Zitelmann (eds), *Die Schatten der Vergangenheit* (Frankfurt/M. and Berlin, 1990).
- <sup>2</sup> Patrick Bahners, writing in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 8 August 1991.
- <sup>3</sup> Cf. the exhibition catalogue, *Bismarck – Preußen, Deutschland und Europa* (Berlin, 1990).
- <sup>4</sup> Karl Kerényi, *Wesen und Gegenwärtigkeit des Mythos* (Munich and Zurich, 1965), p. 133.
- <sup>5</sup> Wilhelm Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie. Untersuchung der Entwicklungsgesetze von Sprache, Sitte und Mythos*, 10 vols, 3rd edn (Leipzig, 1911-20), esp. vol. 4-6: *Mythos und Religion*. Cf. also Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *La mythologie primitive* (Paris, 1935).
- <sup>6</sup> Wilhelm Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie*, vol. 5 (Leipzig, 1914), pp. 434 f. Wundt distinguishes the 'historical heroic myth' as a specific type of folk myth from the 'mythical saga', which resembles a *Märchen* and contains magical motifs.
- <sup>7</sup> Roberto Calasso, *Die Hochzeit von Kadmos und Harmonia* (Frankfurt/M., 1990), p. 28. Cf. also Herfried Münkler, *Odysseus und Kassandra. Politik im Mythos* (Frankfurt/M., 1991), although he repeatedly interprets myth using the insights of modern scholarship. In doing so he often misses any 're-working of reality' in his sources that contradicts these insights. While Calasso argues from the specific to the general, which certainly presupposes a basic definition of 'the general', Münkler, whose book is full of ideas and is highly original in certain areas, argues from the general to the specific, and thus in many cases merely confirms what is already well known.
- <sup>8</sup> 'Die Wibelungen. Weltgeschichte aus der Sage', in *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1887), p. 123.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid. Mircea Eliade has recently defined the 'function' of myth as 'to reveal models, thereby conferring significance on the world and human existence', *Mythos und Wirklichkeit* (Frankfurt/M., 1988), p. 142.

- 10 As in note 8.
- 11 *Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts*, 2nd edn (Laaber, 1989), p. 163.
- 12 The Romantics of the Heidelberg school provided the environment for one of the first studies of European myth-making: C. F. Creutzer and F. J. Mone, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen*, 6 vols (Darmstadt, 1810-26); for France, cf. Christian Amalvi, *De l'art et la manière d'accomoder les héros de l'histoire de France, de Vercingétorix à la Revolution* (Paris, 1988).
- 13 Cf. the work of Wilhelm Wundt cited above (note 5), *Völkerpsychologie*, in which the idea of the individuality of nations is equated with the existence of a collective psychology of a people. See also Max H. Boehm, *Das eigenständige Volk. Volkstheoretische Grundlagen der Ethnopolitik und Geisteswissenschaften* (Göttingen, 1932).
- 14 On the various strands of interpretation and paradigm shifts within German historiography after 1945 cf. most recently Winfried Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, *Historische Zeitschrift, Beihefte*, NF 10 (Munich, 1989), esp. pp. 281-302: 'Von der "politischen Volksgeschichte" zur "neuen Sozialgeschichte"'.
- 15 On this cf. A. Borst, 'Barbarossa 1871', in id., *Reden über die Staufer* (Frankfurt/M., 1978), pp. 91 ff., and id., 'Barbarossas Erwachen – Zur Geschichte der deutschen Identität', in O. Marquard and K. Stierle (eds), *Identität* (Munich, 1979), pp. 277 ff.
- 16 Lothar Kettenacker, 'Der Mythos vom Reich', in Karl Heinz Bohrer (ed.), *Mythos und Moderne. Begriff und Bilder einer Rekonstruktion* (Frankfurt/M., 1983), pp. 261-89, here p. 261. On the medieval idea of the Reich cf. Gottfried Koch, *Auf dem Wege zum Imperium Sacrum* (Berlin, 1972); for the period after the foundation of Bismarck's Reich, Elisabeth Fehrenbach, *Wandlungen des deutschen Kaisergedankens 1871-1918* (Munich, 1969).
- 17 Kettenacker, 'Mythos', p. 262; Helmut Beilner, 'Reichsidee, ständische Erneuerung und Führertum als Elemente des Geschichtsbildes der Weimarer Zeit', *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 1 (1971), pp. 2 f.; cf. also Fritz Schellack, 'Sedan- und Kaisergeburtstagsfeste', in Dieter Düding et al.

(eds), *Öffentliche Festkultur. Politische Feste in Deutschland von der Aufklärung bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg* (Reinbek, 1988), pp. 278-98.

- 18 Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Das Dritte Reich*, ed. by Hans Schwarz (Hamburg, 1931); Jean F. Neurohr, *Der Mythos vom Dritten Reich* (Stuttgart, 1957).
- 19 In *Was ist das Reich? Eine Aussprache unter Deutschen* (Oldenburg, 1932), p. 7, quoted from Kettenacker, 'Mythos', p. 267.
- 20 Arno Borst has perhaps expressed these doubts most clearly in recent times. 'History introduces us to a large number of figures who have lived out their lives, most of whom could not get on with each other, but fought to the death', he wrote in his address of thanks when accepting the 'Preis des Historischen Kollegs' in 1986. 'If we took it seriously, selecting one single identity would force us to reject many others, to repeat the massacres of old. If our way of life deserves to be called a "culture", then we must have inherited something from all historical identities; we must identify precisely every contribution, but cannot identify fully with any one. We are identical only with ourselves' ('Was uns das Mittelalter zu sagen hätte. Über Wissenschaft und Spiel', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 244, 1987, p. 539).

*Translated by Angela Davies*