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**MEDIEVAL GERMANY
IN AMERICA**

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*With a comment by
Otto Gerhard Oexle*

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MEDIEVAL GERMANY IN AMERICA

Patrick J. Geary

**WAS THERE ANYTHING TO LEARN?
American Historians and
German Medieval Scholarship:
A Comment**

Otto Gerhard Oexle

Preface

For the first time since the founding of the German Historical Institute in 1987, the topic of the 1995 Annual Lecture addressed the German Middle Ages—as perceived through American eyes. We invited two distinguished scholars from the United States and Germany, and their presentations made this evening a truly special event.

In his lecture, Professor Patrick J. Geary traced the influence of German medievalists, especially their methods and historiography, on American academia. During the second half of the nineteenth century, German scholarship came to be regarded as an exemplary model, owing to its scholarly excellence. However, within a few decades, German medieval scholarship's function as a model for American academics declined. Professor Geary gave an engaging account of this development and offered at the same time an absorbing analysis of how the perception and interpretation of German medieval history by American historians were shaped by their attempt to explain American history. Professor Otto Gerhard Oexle's comment complemented this analysis with a wealth of observations centered on the provocative question of whether there was anything at all that American medievalists could learn from German medieval scholarship.

The desire to intensify the cooperation between American and German medievalists led the GHI to choose this topic for the 1995 Annual Lecture. Whereas a good deal of the Institute's research in the next years will focus on the history of Germany and the United States during the Cold War, it remains an integral part of our agenda to encourage and support cooperation with historians of different epochs and various historical disciplines, ranging chronologically from the German Middle Ages to the Cold War, and methodologically from political and diplomatic history to cultural and social history. It is this broad understanding of our agenda that gave rise to the idea that the

Institute could be instrumental in promoting the personal and institutional bonds between American and German medievalists.

Indeed, the deepening of institutional relations and exchanges between American and German scholars during the past few years gives reason to hope that the demise of the German Middle Ages in American historical studies described by Professor Geary may soon be a thing of the past. Both Professor Geary, director of the UCLA Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, and Professor Oexle, director of the Max Planck Institute for History in Göttingen, have contributed greatly to this process through their work. At the same time, the support of institutions like the German Academic Exchange Council (DAAD) and the Fulbright Commission—both of which are currently enabling a considerable number of young American graduate students to pursue their research interests in Germany—has been essential. Within the next ten years, we will probably see the number of American scholars working on German medieval history more than double.

Professor Geary's interest in Germany and in German history began with a summer course at the Passau Goethe Institute in 1969. He received his doctorate in medieval studies from Yale University and has held positions at the University of Florida and at Princeton University before he was appointed director of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at UCLA in 1993. He has also served as a research fellow at the Max Planck Institute for History in Göttingen and as a visiting professor at the University of Vienna. Professor Geary's publications include *Furta Sacra, Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (1978; 1991); *Aristocracy in Provence: The Rhône Basin at the Dawn of the Carolingian Age* (1985); *Before France and Germany: The Origins and Transformations of the Merovingian World* (1988; German translation *Die Merowinger. Europa vor Karl dem Großen*, 1996); *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion*

at the End of the First Millennium (1994); and, most recently, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (1994).

Professor Otto Gerhard Oexle studied in Freiburg, Cologne, and Poitiers. After completing his *Habilitation* in medieval studies at the University of Münster, he served as a visiting professor at Tel Aviv University. He also held a position at the University of Hannover before he was appointed director of the Max Planck Institute for History in Göttingen. Professor Oexle has written extensively on medieval social history and medieval mentalities as well as on the perception of the Middle Ages in modern times. Most recently, he has edited a book on *Memoria als Kultur* (1995).

Another fascinating subject, “Imagination, Ritual, Memory, Historiography. Conceptions of the Past in the Middle Ages,” will be the topic of a conference of German and American medievalists to be convened by Patrick Geary, Johannes Fried, and Gerd Althoff in Heidelberg in September 1996. The conference will be sponsored by the German Historical Institute. In September 1997, the Institute will also support a symposium on the history of medieval universities in Washington, D.C., organized by Professors Jürgen Miethke and William J. Courtenay. The stimulating presentations given by Professors Geary and Oexle on the occasion of the German Historical Institute's 1995 Annual Lecture are thus part of a sustained endeavor to renew interest in the German Middle Ages for the benefit of scholars and the interested public on both sides of the Atlantic.

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Detlef Junker

Medieval Germany in America

Patrick J. Geary

Do Americans have anything to learn from the history of Germany in the Middle Ages? If one looks to the professional study of history in America for an answer, it would appear that for American medievalists, the answer is “very little.” According to the American Historical Association’s membership records, there are today some 928 historians in the United States who indicate that their primary area of research and teaching is medieval history. Of this number, only 14, or 1.5 percent, consider Germany their primary area of research. However, these statistics are misleading. The number of American medieval historians who are actively engaged in research and publishing in medieval German history is actually much smaller. I would estimate that there are probably not more than a half-dozen. At American universities, the history of Germany prior to the Reformation holds almost no place in the educational curriculum. Within American society at large, when sociologists, political scientists, and humanists examine the distant past of our modern society, they look to England and France to understand the world from which America sprang. When they explore parallels and patterns in traditional Europe, they likewise avoid German-speaking lands almost entirely. Moreover, when Americans look for models of how to study this deep past of our common heritage, few if any rely on the centuries-old tradition of German historical studies but rather turn almost exclusively to the English and French historical traditions. This situation is beginning to change, thanks to patient work on both sides of the

Atlantic.¹ Yet how this situation came to be says much, not only about medieval Germany in America but about the at times tortured relationship between German and American intellectual traditions during the past century.

This lack of interest in medieval Germany stands in sharp contrast to the state of historical studies a century ago. Medieval German history and German scholarship played a major role in the creation of modern historical studies in this country in the second half of the nineteenth century. For the first generations of scholars of historical studies, German history was deemed an essential part of the training, not only of medievalists but of all historians. No better qualifications could be imagined than to have studied in the great medieval seminars of Germany or to have been a *Mitarbeiter* (fellow) with the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, the great center of medieval German history. The founders of the professional study of history in America had largely been trained in Leipzig, Berlin, and Heidelberg, and the twin German disciplines of medieval history and philology were particularly significant in this process, first at the University of Michigan and Harvard University, then especially at Johns Hopkins University's Seminar in History and Politics, which is widely considered to be the founding institution of the professional study of history in this country.² Although not primarily

¹ For an excellent survey of the historiography of medieval Germany in the United States and Great Britain that concentrates more on the post-World War I period than does this paper, see Edward Peters, "More Trouble With Henry: The Historiography of Medieval Germany in the Angloliterate World, 1888–1995," *Central European History* 28 (1995): 47–72.

² Ernst Schulz, "German and American Historiography in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *An Interrupted Past: German-speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann and James J. Sheehan (New York, 1991), 13, n. 8. On early medieval scholarship in America in general, see Hans Rudolf Guggis-

medievalists, these scholars had learned the historian's craft in seminars dedicated to medieval Germany, and they brought both the method and the subject home with them.

The enthusiasm for medieval German history was, however, short lived. In other areas of German history, especially the Reformation period and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Americans have made major and ongoing contributions to our understanding of Germany and to Germans' understanding of their own past. In medieval history, this has seldom been the case. Medieval German history is even today marginal to the university curricula of most American universities; interpretations of Germany before the sixteenth century hardly intrude on the thought of a wider circle of intellectuals. Moreover, interpretations of medieval German history by Americans seldom, if ever, have a serious impact on Germans' understanding of their past. How is one to understand this decline, and how, if at all, should it be rectified? In other words, why did differing generations of Americans justify the study of medieval German history in this country, and why was this study abandoned? These are the questions that I would like to address here, offering two ways of understanding the premature death of German medieval history in America and suggesting some ways in which the situation may or perhaps should be reversed to the mutual advantage of both societies.

berg, *Das europäische Mittelalter im amerikanischen Geschichtsdenken des 19. und des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts* (Basel, 1964). See Charles Kendall Adams' description of the early seminar at the Univ. of Michigan in W. Stull Holt, ed., *Historical Scholarship in the United States, 1876–1901: As Revealed in the Correspondence of Herbert B. Adams* (Baltimore, 1938), 78–80. On the early years of the Hopkins Seminar in History and Politics, see Marvin E. Gettleman, ed., *The Johns Hopkins University Seminary of History and Politics: The Records of an American Educational Institution, 1877–1912*. 5 vols. (New York, 1987), esp. vol. I, ix–xi and 3–82.

The first explanation for the rapid decline in interest in the German Middle Ages in American academe is fairly straightforward and superficially convincing. Medieval Germany was essential in American universities until the first decades of this century, but the anti-German atmosphere of World War I ended that trend along with interest in all things German. In other areas of German studies, interest in Germany revived with the great wave of refugee scholars from Germany and Austria in the 1930s. However, because the medieval historians who arrived in the United States as refugees from Germany in the 1930s were cultural or intellectual historians and had never taught or researched German history as such in this country, this period of German history did not undergo the same renewal that later German history has. In sum, according to this line of argumentation, the aftermath of the two wars, combined with Americans' well known and lamentable ignorance of foreign languages, especially German, has meant that medieval German history has never recovered in the United States.

There is much that is true, although partial, in this version of the story. German history in general and medieval history in particular did enjoy a privileged place in the birth of scientific history in the United States. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, German scholarship was venerated in progressive American institutions such as Johns Hopkins as the pinnacle of scientific study, and universities and colleges eagerly sought German or German-trained professors while trying to emulate German seminar methods. The historian most closely associated with Johns Hopkins in those years, Herbert Baxter Adams, had obtained his doctorate in Heidelberg.³ Columbia University

³ Later he recalled the profound impression that Bernhard Erdmannsdörffer's (1833–1901) medieval history seminar on Otto of Freising had made on him. In the 1880s, Adams even advised a prospective student in Dresden not to abandon his studies in Germany for the

appointed a German, Francis Lieber, professor of history and political science.⁴ In 1884 Harvard hired a young German, Kuno Francke, who had spent two years working in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* as its professor of German history and literature.⁵ Likewise, Bryn Mawr, the women's college most closely connected with the Johns Hopkins Seminar, imported the medievalist and Low German philologist Agathe Lasch to instruct its students.⁶

However, in the course of little more than a generation, this German tradition and the scholars who practiced it fell into ill repute and oblivion in North America. German history in general and medieval German history in particular were deemed of little value to Americans, especially when such studies were in the hands of Germans or German-trained Americans. Charles Homer Haskins, America's greatest medievalist of the early twentieth century and himself a product of the Hopkins Seminar, wrote in 1923 that many phases of German history needed re-examination and noted that American scholars of his generation were making important contributions, in part because, unlike their predecessors, they were not exclusively trained in Germany.⁷ By the 1930s, few American historians knew any-

more "limited privilege" of studying with him in Baltimore. Gettleman, ed., *Hopkins University Seminary*, vol. 1, 13.

⁴ Schulin, "German and American Historiography," 14.

⁵ See his autobiography, Kuno Francke, *Deutsche Arbeit in Amerika* (Leipzig, 1930), 2, where he explains that his charge was to interpret his position as instructor in German "in the widest sense, ... that is, to interpret it as a collective term for political, social, intellectual, and artistic phenomena of German history; my instructional duty was then, in essence, in the service of German cultural history."

⁶ Robert Peters and Timothy Sodmann, eds., *Agathe Lasch: Ausgewählte Schriften zur niederdeutschen Philologie* (Neumünster, 1979), ix.

⁷ "Scholars [of German history] of the present generation have contributed more that is independent than did their predecessors, who were

thing about the practice of medieval history in Germany, and fewer still were engaged in the study of Germany in the period before the Reformation. In 1934, when C. W. David wrote an account of medieval history in America from 1884 to 1934, apart from vague references to the teaching of German history, he could cite only one American engaged in writing German history. That was James Westfall Thompson, whose *Feudal Germany* had appeared in 1928.⁸ What had intervened most obviously, of course, was World War I, with its concomitant anti-German sentiment that so profoundly affected every area of American-German social and cultural interactions.

The Great War was certainly devastating to the intellectual relationship between nascent American and established German scholarship, and the devastation worked itself out on the personal as well as the intellectual level. German emigrant communities and German cultural organizations at every level suffered ostracism, hostility, and occasional violence that has left enduring wounds. Some German scholars such as Kuno Francke, who had become an American citizen, although not blind to the “one grave defect of imperial Germany: the arrogance and overbearing of the military and bureaucratic class,”⁹ remained a loyal supporter of his fatherland even while refusing to support active pro-German intervention or organized protests by German-Americans. This earned him increasing opprobrium from both sides. When the United States actually entered the war, he

more exclusively trained in Germany, and the war has compelled the re-examination of many phases of German history, especially the more recent.” Charles Homer Haskins, “European History and American Scholarship,” *American Historical Review* 28 (1923): 219–220.

⁸ C. W. David, “American Historiography of the Middle Ages, 1884–1934,” *Speculum* 10 (1935): 125–137.

⁹ Kuno Francke, *A German American's Confession of Faith* (New York, 1915), 14.

resigned his professorship, closed the German Museum at Harvard that he had founded, and retired from public life until 1920. He then reopened the German Museum but never returned to his Harvard professorship. Francke, with powerful support from Harvard's administration, was fortunate in his ability to survive the war with only minor personal affronts and problems.

Some German scholars in America met with much greater problems. Consider the case of Professor Agathe Lasch (1879–1942), a brilliant medieval philologist and expert on Low German dialects. She began teaching at Bryn Mawr in 1910, and by 1916 was promoted to the position of associate professor. As anti-German sentiment rose in America, the college was not a particularly comfortable institution for German-born scholars. Its president, the charismatic M. Carey Thomas, herself a dynamic figure in American feminist education, had studied Germanic philology in Germany. At Bryn Mawr, she continued and encouraged the German philological tradition, just as Herbert Baxter Adams sought to transplant the John Hopkins tradition of German-modeled scholarship to its history and political science courses. Bryn Mawr students were even required to study German as a prerequisite for graduation. It was under this influence that she recruited and initially supported the young Agathe Lasch.

However, as America moved closer to war, Thomas's resentment toward Germany became more pronounced and, according to one biographer, "her long-standing antipathy to the Germans added sharpness to her attitude and led her during the war to act with regrettable harshness towards any Germans who had the misfortune to cross her path."¹⁰ There is no evidence that she treated Lasch with anything but respect, however, the college abolished the requirement of German language and replaced it

¹⁰ Finch, *Carey Thomas of Bryn Mawr* (New York, 1947), 295.

with Spanish or Italian. Feeling increasingly alienated in this hostile environment, when the prospect of war became inevitable, Lasch resigned her position and returned to Germany. There she continued her work in philology, specifically dialectology, and eventually obtained a professorship in Hamburg. But the story, unfortunately, does not end there, because Agathe Lasch was Jewish. In the deteriorating atmosphere of Germany, she attempted to renew her contacts at Bryn Mawr in an increasingly urgent attempt to escape the growing Nazi menace. In 1933 she lost her chair and, both through colleagues and directly, appealed to the president of Bryn Mawr for assistance in finding a post. However, the academic world that had once welcomed her had changed. By the 1930s a friend of Lasch, attempting to find her a position in the United States, was told that Bryn Mawr had “a full professor in German Philology, and very few graduate students in it.”¹¹ No one needed a German philologist, particularly, the letter suggested, a woman. Eventually, the possibility of escape disappeared entirely. She was deported in 1937 and died in a concentration camp in 1942.

Between the wars, little attention was given to German history, particularly medieval German history, in the United States. For the entire period between the founding of the Medieval Academy of America in 1926 and 1940, a single article on German history appeared in its journal, *Speculum*, and this was on “Ottokar II of Bohemia and the Double Election of 1257.” Actually, even this topic was of interest to American medievalists not because of its significance to German history but rather because one of the rival emperors elected in 1257 was Richard, Earl of Cornwall.¹²

¹¹ Unsigned letter to Mrs. Richter Juchter dated June 17, 1938, Bryn Mawr College Archives.

¹² F. R. Lewis, “Ottokar II of Bohemia and the Double Election of 1257,” *Speculum* 12 (1937): 512–515.

The influx of refugee historians from Germany and Austria transformed and revitalized interest in modern German history but not in medieval.¹³ Scholars who did manage to obtain positions in the United States during the 1930s did not do much to change American hostility toward and ignorance of medieval Germany. Although a number of important medievalists figured among them, from Ernst Kantorowicz to Gerhard Ladner, Theodor E. Mommsen, and Stephan Kuttner, to the philologists Konstantin Reichardt and Erich Auerbach, the kind of scholarship these intellectual leaders pursued in America avoided German history and culture for the most part in favor of church history and intellectual and cultural history of the European civilization. The students of these refugees, who have had such a prominent place in medieval studies in America in the past decades, were thus from the start not German historians but historians of European cultural history. In a recent article on the two giants of this tradition, Kantorowicz and Mommsen, Robert Lerner, a specialist on medieval religious history, lists the distinguished students whom Mommsen produced. They include a numismatist, a canon lawyer, a historian of Spanish and French institutions, two Italianists, a church historian, and a paleographer. None have devoted their careers to the study of Germany or German-speaking lands.¹⁴

¹³ See the remarkable series of essays in Lehmann/Sheehan, eds., *An Interrupted Past*.

¹⁴ Robert E. Lerner, "Ernst Kantorowicz and Theodor E. Mommsen," in Lehmann/Sheehan, eds., *An Interrupted Past*, 203–204. Among those who earned a doctorate at Princeton University after working entirely or substantially with Mommsen are Howard Adelson of City College in New York, Robert Benson of UCLA, Thomas Bisson of Harvard, William Bowsky of UC at Davis, Gene Brucker of UC at Berkeley, and Norman Cantor of NYU; among those who studied with him at Cornell (where he taught for only two years before his death) are Karl

However, although the foregoing account of the decline of German medieval history in the United States is not entirely incorrect, it would be superficial and misleading to suggest that the repudiation of German history was simply the result of the animosities of two destructive wars and the fortuitous research interests of refugee medievalists. A more accurate analysis suggests that from the days of Adams, Americans have had an ambivalent attitude toward the dominant tradition of German historiography, which the war experience only allowed to emerge more explicitly. Likewise, the aspects of medieval German history most appreciated by these American scholars did not represent the mainstream of late nineteenth-century German scholarship. American historians from Adams on were more interested in using aspects of the German past as developed by German medievalists as explanatory models for American history than to come to terms with German history per se. Moreover, among those Americans who really understood and appreciated the dynamism of historical discourse within the German historical community, sympathies were largely with the broad, integrative approach to German history represented by Karl Lamprecht, not with the mainstream of German political historians represented by Georg von Below.¹⁵ Since, by the end of the World War I,

Morrison of Rutgers, William Percy of the University of Massachusetts at Boston, and Richard Rouse of UCLA.

¹⁵ As early as 1897 Earle Wilbur Dow, a historian at the University of Michigan who had studied briefly in Leipzig in 1894 and again in 1897, published a long and generally favorable discussion of Lamprecht's *Deutsche Geschichte*: "Features of the New History: Apropos of Lamprecht's 'Deutsche Geschichte'," *American Historical Review* 3 (1898): 431–448. Dow showed a great familiarity with Lamprecht's work and the debate that it had engendered both within and beyond the German intellectual world. Dow's enthusiasm for a history that encompasses "the activities of man as a social being; political phenomena are neither the only facts to be considered, nor the state the

Lamprecht's work came to a dead end in Germany, the American interest in Lamprecht's cultural history and Americans' progressive acceptance of the sociological traditions of Max Weber put them even further from the spirit of Weimar German medievalism.

Americans who studied in Germany did not necessarily come away with a love of the German approach to teaching and scholarship, even if they recognized the importance of its intellectual rigor. M. Carey Thomas, for example, had studied Anglo Saxon, Gothic, Old High German, and Middle High German at Leipzig, although she bridled under what she considered her instructors' excessive glorification of old Germanic languages over her native English. However, she persevered until the minister of education for Saxony disallowed her and other women students studying with liberal professors to enroll for doctoral degrees. Disgusted by this refusal, she transferred to Zurich, where she received her Ph.D. *summa cum laude* in 1882.

As a result of her experience in Europe, Thomas held an ambivalent attitude toward German scholarship shared by other American scholars of her generation, male and female alike. On the one hand, she recognized the superiority of German philological studies and the necessity of acquiring a German or German-style education in order to achieve recognition in her field. On the other hand, she deeply resented "barbarous

element for which alone all others exist" and which promises "scientific conclusions" (448) was in many ways typical of pre-war American historians. On Lamprecht, see Roger Chickering, *Karl Lamprecht. A German Academic Life (1856–1915)* (New Jersey, 1993).

It is all too easy to present a caricature of von Below as a political historian opposed to the transformation of history into a social science. For a much more balanced appreciation, see Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Ein politischer Historiker. Georg von Below (1858–1927)," in *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft um 1900*, ed. Notker Hammerstein (Stuttgart, 1988), 283–312.

Germany” and the treatment she had received there and the superior attitude of German scholars and officials.¹⁶ Likewise, for all his talk of the German seminar system and his praise of the German university, Herbert Baxter Adams did not and did not intend to introduce that system as such into Johns Hopkins, nor did he hold German historical methods in awe. As early as 1887 he wrote to Frederic Bancroft. “I have long cherished the notion that our American students devote too exclusive attention to Germany in their foreign study,” explaining that only an older brother’s hesitations about French morals had prevented him from following his original plan to study in Paris.¹⁷ Although the inspiration for a format in which students rather than professors presented their work certainly came from his German experience, he had no illusion that he could replicate the experience of a German seminar in Baltimore, nor did he consider such an end even desirable: “The severe method of the German Seminary will never do here where the instructors are young and not as well able to criticize the work as the man who wrote the paper, except as to literary form,” he is reported to have said in the Hopkins Seminar. “Criticism here is private between pupil and instructor and we all take pains to profit by such criticism. Americans have better notions of refined criticism than the Germans, whose method is brutal. Criticism, not trampling, is valuable.”¹⁸

Not only was the pioneering generation not prepared to replicate German scholarly methods, as James Sheehan has noted, but “German influence *on* American history did not produce much American interest *in* German history. American historians turned to Germany in order to discover the intellectual tools and institutional basis with which to create their own national

¹⁶ Finch, *Carey Thomas*, 120.

¹⁷ Holt, *Historical Scholarship*, 99.

¹⁸ Gettleman, ed., *Hopkins University Seminary*, vol.1, May 8, 1884, 3.

history.¹⁹ The first great impulse toward German history was inextricably combined with the Aryan racist theories of neo-Darwinism commonly referred to as the Teutonic origins thesis. This idea, developing first in German Romantic historiography and then picked up and amplified by British liberal historians, argued that primitive Germanic society was the source of first German, then Anglo-Saxon, and finally American political institutions and liberties. America, and especially Anglo-Saxon America, was thus the culmination of Germanic racial evolution.

Herbert Baxter Adams was the major proponent of this thesis in the United States, although it was far from original with him. In the 1870s he had gone to Berlin to study political science with Heinrich von Treitschke, Ernst Curtius, and Hermann Grimm and then moved to Heidelberg in 1875 to study with Johann Caspar Bluntschli. He also attended lectures of Eduard A. Winkelmann on historical methodology and medieval historiography. His experience in medieval history was a secondary aspect of his studies but proved to be particularly influential to him later. In 1884 he described his experience in the Heidelberg seminaries (seminars) of Professors Bluntschli and Bernhard Erdmannsdörffer. The former was his primary professor, but the latter's seminar on Otto of Freising's *Gesta Frederici imperatoris* seems to have most profoundly affected the young American. He recalled that the seminar met once a week in Erdmannsdörffer's home. Each student had a copy of the text, and each week a different member of the seminar translated and commented "in the light of parallel citations from other authors belonging to Bishop Otto's time, who are to be found in the folio edition of Pertz's *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*."²⁰

¹⁹ Lehmann/Sheehan, eds., *An Interrupted Past*, 6.

²⁰ Herbert B. Adams, *Methods of Historical Study*, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science II, nos. 1–2 (Baltimore, 1884), 65–68.

He further explained that:

subjects of the discussion and for special inquiry arose at every meeting, and the Professor often assigned such subjects to the individuals more interested, for investigation and report. One such topic was the origin of the Italian communes, whether they were of Roman or of Germanic origin. An American student [Adams himself] undertook to defend the Roman origins based on the work of M. François Guizot.²¹

Erdmannsdörffer sent him instead to read Karl von Hegel's *Geschichte der Städteverfassung von Italien*²² and Georg Ludwig von Maurer's *Geschichte der Stddteverfassung in Deutschland*.²³ Hegel, the son of the philosopher, student of the Göttingen and later Heidelberg professor and Frankfurt parliamentarian Georg Gervinus, and a collaborator in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, was a devoted Germanist. In his *History of Italian Communes*, he had written that the foundation of the Italian republics was purely Germanic with only a light patina of Roman tradition.²⁴ Adams, smarting from the humiliation of being criticized for having defended the French Guizot's Romanist thesis in the seminar (perhaps the origin of his sense of the "brutality" of the German method), immediately warmed to this theory of the Germanic origins of urban freedom, not only in Italy but in England and in the English colonies, a thesis he

²¹ François Guizot, *Histoire des origines du gouvernement representatif en Europe* (Brussels, 1851).

²² Karl von Hegel, *Geschichte der Stddteverfassung von Italien seit der Zeit der römischen Herrschaft bis zum Ausgang des zwölften Jahrhunderts*. 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1846).

²³ Georg Ludwig von Maurer, *Geschichte der Städteverfassung in Deutschland*. 4 vols. (Erlangen, 1869–71).

²⁴ On Karl von Hegel and the place of his historical work in the politics of mid-nineteenth-century Germany, see Alexander Deisenroth, *Deutsches Mittelalter und deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft im 19. Jahrhundert*, Reihe der Forschungen 11 (Rheinfelden, 1983), 133–137.

found supported in Henry Maine's *Village Communities*.²⁵ Adams claimed that "that line of investigation has occupied the American student ever since 1876, and the present work of the historical seminary at the Johns Hopkins University is to some extent the outgrowth of the germ brought to Baltimore from the Heidelberg seminary."²⁶

The proponents of the new "scientific" history generated their own racist myth of German history through a selective and distorted reading of German history and philology. Not really interested in German history but only in "Teutonic germs" that would reappear in English and American institutions, their exaltation of German history was in inverse proportion to their understanding of it. We must note that neither Adams nor his students in America had any interest in doing independent research on Germanic institutions. His own *The Germanic Origin of New England Towns*²⁷ draws on a few passages in Tacitus's *Germania* and his own wanderings in the Odenwald across the Neckar from Heidelberg rather than on serious research with primary sources. He appeals to "the labors of those patient German specialists, von Maurer, Hanssen, Meitzen, Nasse and Georg Waitz, who have shown in the early Constitutional History of Germany the same organizing power as Canon Stubbs has exercised in writing the Constitutional History of England," who first proved that "the tree of English liberty certainly roots in German soil."²⁸

²⁵ See Adams' earlier telling of the story in the essay "Cooperation in University Work," which appeared at the end of his *The Germanic Origin of New England Towns*, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science II (Baltimore, 1882), 40.

²⁶ Adams, *Methods of Historical Study*, 67.

²⁷ See note 25.

²⁸ Adams, *Germanic Origin of New England Towns*, 11.

Adams' original experience with the theory of Germanic origins encountered in Heidelberg was developed and expanded by his contact with the English liberal historians, who were, if anything, even more racist in their use of the Germanic origins tradition than were its original German proponents. Chief among these was the English historian Edward Augustus Freeman (1823–92), amateur historian, racial polemicist, and regius professor at Oxford. In time, Adams and his students moved away from this causative model of American origins.

The germ theory died a slow death, even after its attack by American historians such as Frederick Jackson Turner and medievalists like Harvard's Henry Adams.²⁹ It continued to be espoused by Germans, including Friedrich Wilhelm Eduard Keutgen (1861–1925), a close friend of von Below and historian of urban constitutional history to whom Johns Hopkins offered a permanent position. Keutgen only spent the academic year 1904–05 at Johns Hopkins and declined to remain in the United States. He did, however, write an article that appeared that year in the annual report of the American Historical Association, entitled “On the Necessity in America of the Study of the Early History of Modern European Nations,” that proclaimed the “vigor and importance of the Germanic race for the development of modern democracy and culture.”³⁰

Three years later, James Westfall Thompson, professor of history at the University of Chicago and the first American to devote a considerable amount of his scholarly energies to German history, quoted extensively from Keutgen's article on the

²⁹ On Henry Adams and the germ theory, see Guggisberg, *Das europäische Mittelalter*, 65–76.

³⁰ Cited in the minutes of the Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, April 1904, *American Historical Review* 10 (1905): 502.

second page of his *Reference Studies in Medieval History*, a bibliography of medieval historical works:

Vulgarly described as barbarians though you find them, they possessed cultural conceptions of their own and institutions of the strongest vitality, allowing of the richest further evolution. They implanted in the Roman soil political institutions which were their very own. They brought with them primitive but elastic systems of civil and criminal law and of legal procedure, and likewise an economic system, novel methods of land tenure and agriculture. Their constitutional and legal systems, moreover, were based on conceptions or convictions fundamentally distinct from anything Roman, but furnishing the main root out of which the most modern democratic institutions have sprung.³¹

Only World War I could effectively end the open espousal of the germ theory.

The 1923 edition of *Reference Studies in Medieval History* indicates the shift in American attitudes toward the Germans that had taken place in the intervening fourteen years. Although Thompson did not abandon the citation from Keutgen, in the second edition of his book it had been moved to page xxv of the introduction and was preceded by a quotation from “the great French scholar Rénan, in a notable protest against the aridity of German rationalism...”³² The subsection on “Barbarian Races of Europe” had entirely disappeared and was replaced with the less controversial “The Barbarian World.” Germany apparently was no longer the unambiguous source of democracy.

But if, in the aftermath of World War I, one did not study German history in order to recognize “the main root out of which the most modern democratic institutions have sprung,”

³¹ James Westfall Thompson, *Reference Studies in Medieval History* (Chicago, 1907; 2d ed. 1914), 2.

³² James Westfall Thompson, *Reference Studies in Medieval History*, rev. and enl. ed. (Chicago, 1923–24), pt. 1, xxv.

then why should an American be interested in medieval Germany? By the 1920s, the germ theory was replaced by the Turner thesis, which taught that American civilization, far from being a replication in the New World of Aryan or any other institutional, social, or cultural traditions, was the unique product of the frontier.³³ It was the westward expansion that created a new civilization in the New World, a thesis that Thompson was as ready to adopt in the service of German medieval history in America as he had been with the older. Thompson's new justification, which he elaborated in his *Feudal Germany*, paralleled the Turner thesis just as clearly as his pre-war justification had echoed the germ theory. This time, it was not Keutgen but Lamprecht whom he quoted to justify attention to medieval Germany: "The great deed of the German people in the Middle Ages was the recovery of three fifths of modern Germany from the Slavs." Thompson goes on to say that:

The wars in Italy and along the French border, or even the Crusades never diverted the eyes of the German people away from the great territory beyond the Elbe and the Inn which their forebears had once dwelt in and ruled over. The deep determina-

³³ On Turner's role in the attack on the Germanic germ theory as developed by Freeman, see Robert E. Lerner, "Turner and the Revolt Against E. A. Freeman," *Arizona and the West* 5 (1963), 101–108, cited in Gettleman, ed., *Hopkins University Seminary*, vol. 1, 26. One must also wonder about the extent to which Turner may have drawn upon German studies of the *Drang nach Osten* for his thesis, perhaps in the same way that Adams had drawn upon German racial theories, although his own frontier experience and extensive studies of the fur trade were more significant. Turner was in contact with Karl Lamprecht, who wrote him two years after the publication of his paper on the frontier to say that he had found "a strong similarity in many respects with our colonizing pioneers." Quoted in Ray Allen Billington, *The Genesis of the Frontier Thesis: A Study in Historical Creativity* (San Marino, Calif., 1971), 173.

tion in the hearts of the German people to recover these lands from the Slavs, the resolute, though often ruthless way in which the event was achieved, is one of the most stirring stories in the annals of history.... The only thing comparable to this achievement in modern annals is the history of the expansion of the American people westward from the Atlantic seaboard over the Alleghenies [*sic*], down the rivers and across the great plains. In both instances the work was the work of the common people and independent of governmental initiative, the work of the pioneer and the settler subjugating the forest with the ax, the fields with the plow, and driving the Slav or redman, as the case may be, before him by his prowess in arms. What the New West meant to young America that the New East meant to medieval Germany.³⁴

The whole second volume of Thompson's book was devoted to this eastward expansion, which he saw as the culmination of medieval German history. An outdated racist justification for the study of German history had been replaced by a more modern one.³⁵ The eastward expansion of Germany may well have been one of the most salient characteristics of medieval German history. Robert Bartlett's recent comparative study of European expansion on the Slavic, Celtic, and Islamic frontiers suggests that it was characteristic of much of Europe.³⁶ However, the way that Thompson presented and glorified this expansion was more in step with Weimar *Ostforschung* than anyone today could accept. Nevertheless, his work received scant praise in Germany. In his review of Thompson's work in the *Historische Zeitschrift*,

³⁴ Thompson, *Feudal Germany*. 2 vols. (New York, 1928; repr. 1962), vol. 1, xviii.

³⁵ On German scholarship on eastern Europe between the wars, see Gerd Althoff, "Die Beurteilung der mittelalterlichen Ostpolitik als Paradigma für zeitgebundene Geschichtsbewertung," in *Die Deutschen und ihr Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 1992), 147–164 and notes 210–217.

³⁶ Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (London, 1993).

while lauding Thompson's attempt to write German history for an American public, Bernhard Schmeidler, whom Thompson had singled out for thanks in his preface, found the book "*ruckständ[ig]*" (out of date), the volume on the expansion even more so than the first volume. But beyond the usual criticisms of the American's ignorance of the latest bibliography and his adherence to outdated theses, Schmeidler was particularly unhappy with Thompson's characterization of the emperor Frederick Barbarossa as a tyrant and a disaster for Germany and also with his sharp attack on modern German historians, whose preoccupation with *Kaisergeschichte* he saw as "a laudation of Hohenzollern pretorianism." Thompson, while willing to compare German expansion with the American West or to see Lothar II as a "state rights" man who would have stood with John C. Calhoun in the America of 1850, was very sensitive to the excessive interest of German historians in Italian policy and the resulting failure "to appreciate the enormous significance of the interior changes in Germany, in ideas and especially in institutions."³⁷

Within Germany, Thompson was deeply interested in economic and cultural history, as his praise of Karl Nitzsch and Lamprecht indicates. For him, the development of German feudal institutions was "the product of social and economic conditions played upon by political purposes."³⁸ Although years later Thompson was sharply critical of both these scholars, particularly of Lamprecht—who, Thompson said, "in his attempt to make a science of history he had betrayed history and had ceased to be an historian"³⁹—he continued to support their

³⁷ Thompson, *Feudal Germany*, vol. 1, 320.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 321.

³⁹ James Westfall Thompson and Bernard J. Holm, *A History of Historical Writing*. Vol. II: *The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New York, 1942), 427.

fundamental insights into the economic and structural underpinnings of history in opposition to traditional political history. Nitzsch, he wrote, “never received the credit he deserved,” since he challenged both liberalism and idealism.⁴⁰ Of Lamprecht, he wrote that in opposition to the Rankian narrative, “Lamprecht’s query required a genetic treatment of society as a whole in order to determine its psychic consciousness, or, as modern sociologists would say, its behavior patterns.... Lamprecht’s acute criticism had struck home.”⁴¹

It may be this tendency to turn away from internal political history and toward social and economic conditions that, more than anything else, may have discouraged other Americans from pursuing German history, or Germans from appreciating the efforts of American medievalists. Most German medievalists rejected the Weimar state system, and their nostalgia for the Hohenzollern drove them further into the kind of political history that American scholars, with their interest in the relationship between cultural, economic, and social factors, found increasingly arid. The mutual bitterness of the war experience only made the growing rift between types of historical enterprise, indeed conceptions of history, all the more intense.

If the generation of émigré historians did not revitalize medieval German history, the reason can be found within the historical issues of the German intellectual world from which they came. One, Kantorowicz, had indeed written the immensely popular but controversial biography of Frederick II.⁴² In America, however, he not only repudiated his earlier work but confined himself largely to the study of pan-European phenomena. Theodor E. Mommsen, although trained in the *Monumenta*

⁴⁰ Ibid., 421.

⁴¹ Ibid., 425.

⁴² Ernst Kantorowicz, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite* (Berlin, 1927).

tradition and the editor of *Italienische Annalekten zur Reichsgeschichte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, was uneasy about the prevailing German tradition of textual edition rather than interpretation and devoted himself to the history of ideas after his departure from Germany.⁴³ Both scholars were, in a way, typical of the émigré medievalists. While émigré modern historians focused on German history in order to understand what went wrong in Germany's recent past, medievalists abandoned Germany altogether for a broader view of pre-national or pre-nationalist European culture and unity. German history became largely irrelevant to them and their students.

Because Germans would not ask the kind of sociological and economic questions that interested Americans or the French, and because Americans, even those trained by German émigrés, would not research the particularities of Germany, the gap that opened at the turn of the century continued to widen. German history in America has largely meant pre-history of the Nazi period. If medievalists have had different agendas, they have had to pursue them on different terrains.

Can we learn anything about this past that will be of relevance for the future? First, the experiences of the germ theory and the interpretations of the eastward expansion should warn us not to look to German history to find easy parallels to our own. If we Americans are to take German history seriously, we must be producers, not simply consumers. Second, if American scholars are to devote themselves seriously to the study of German history, it must be done in a way that respects the integrity of the subject. The history of Germany is more than *Vorstudien* to Holocaust history and must be accepted as such. Finally, Americans who study German history cannot try to do so as if they were Germans. We live in a different culture that begs different questions and arrives at different kinds of answers.

⁴³ Lerner, "Ernst Kantorowicz and Theodor E. Mommsen," 201–202.

Until we can free ourselves from the burden of the past century of American approaches to medieval Germany, we will be doomed not only to cultural isolation but to irrelevance, both in this country and in Germany.

**Was There Anything to Learn?
American Historians and German Medieval
Scholarship: A Comment**

Otto Gerhard Oexle

Patrick Geary's penetrating analysis brings out the specific connections between American medievalists and the German Middle Ages as well as between American historians and German medieval scholarship. There is much food for thought in his discussion for a German historian. What is more, Geary takes into account the central idea of the different ways in which the Middle Ages have been interpreted over time. In other words, he considers the manner in which historical models are shaped by the thinking and perceptions of different generations.

I

It is remarkable that the question of whether something can be learned at all from German medieval scholarship was positively answered by American medievalists at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Especially the Germans' work with primary sources and their philological methods were highly regarded. Indeed, what else could American historians have learned from a historiography that had taken upon itself, first and foremost, the task of serving the state by describing the history of the development of the German nation-state—always with an eye toward the founding of the German Reich in

1870–71? This research goal was most comprehensively articulated by the medievalist Georg von Below.¹ Today he is largely forgotten, but at that time, he was both unusually influential and very representative of German historians. His major work, first published in 1914, bore the title *Der deutsche Staat des Mittelalters* (the German medieval state). This title reveals the main intention of the book, namely, “to prove that the medieval state was a state, the medieval constitution, the constitution of a state,” and to describe “medieval constitutional law as public law.”² At the same time, von Below, the specialist in medieval history, formulated an agenda for the entire discipline of German historical studies. He argued that for German historians, the consequence of the founding of the Reich in 1870-71 should have been: political history, “constitutional history” (i.e. *Verfassungsgeschichte*) and economic history, the latter especially with regard to the role of the state. Was there anything that American historians could have learned from such a program?

Geary also draws attention to the interest with which Karl Lamprecht and his *Kulturgeschichte* (cultural history) have been received in the United States since 1900. American “New History” grew in particular out of the soil of Lamprecht’s *Kulturgeschichte*.³ American historians certainly understood that Lamprecht’s research agenda stood in opposition to mainstream German historical scholarship of the time. From today’s point of view, however, we have to recognize that Lamprecht’s *Kulturgeschichte* did not possess the potential for scientific and intellectual

¹ Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Ein politischer Historiker: Georg von Below (1858–1927)," in *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft um 1900*, ed. Notker Hammerstein (Stuttgart, 1988), 283–312.

² Georg von Below, *Der deutsche Staat des Mittelalters. Eine Grundlegung der deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte*. 2d ed. (Leipzig, 1925), iii.

³ Luise Schorn-Schütte, Karl Lamprecht. *Kulturgeschichtsschreibung zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik* (Göttingen, 1984), 287ff.

reform because it had been shaped by positivism, evolutionism, and rigid nationalism. Lamprecht's dilemma was, on the one hand, that he viewed the nation-state as the most fundamental and the most "natural"⁴ of all the possible forms of human communities; and that, on the other hand, his understanding of universal history, with its orientation toward cultural history, was based on the model of German national history as he himself had drafted it. In short, to quote Roger Chickering, Lamprecht was a historian who, with "force and genial fantasy asked the right questions of German history and, with the same amount of force and fantasy, found the wrong answers."⁵ One could also say: Despite the explicit antagonism between Lamprecht and his adversaries, such as von Below or Meinecke, there were elements in their work that revealed a profound, if unacknowledged, agreement.

The catastrophe of the year 1918 did not elicit a change of perspectives in Germany. On the contrary, it brought about a hardening, even a petrification, and the forced attitude of "*Nun erst recht!*" (Now we're really gonna show 'em!), as once again most resolutely demonstrated by Georg von Below.⁶ Precisely because of this hardening, there was nothing to counteract the very clearly expressed motto of foreign historians after 1918 "not to learn anything from Germany anymore," or "désapprendre de l'Allemagne," as called for by Henri Pirenne. Geary shows how

⁴ Guiseppe Cacciatore, "Karl Lamprecht und die 'Kulturgeschichte' im Rahmen des Nachdenkens über die überlieferten Paradigmen der Theorie der Geschichte," in *Karl Lamprecht weiterdenken. Universal- und Kulturgeschichte heute*, ed. Gerald Diesener (Leipzig, 1993), 335–351, esp. 344.

⁵ Roger Chickering, "Ein schwieriges Heldenleben. Bekenntnisse eines Biographen," in Diesener, ed., *Karl Lamprecht weiterdenken*, 207–222, esp. 221; cf. id., *Karl Lamprecht. A German Academic Life (1856–1915)* (New Jersey, 1993), 130.

⁶ Oexle, "Ein Politischer Historiker," 303ff.

this motto also affected American medieval scholarship. On the whole, new perspectives were not developed in Germany.⁷ And, whereas on the left bank of the Rhine during the entire period between the two world wars, someone like Marc Bloch⁸ extensively and comprehensively reviewed new publications of German medieval scholarship with great intellectual intensity and in a meticulous and critical manner, obviously no German historian felt the urge to embark on something similar himself. The great breakthrough of French medieval scholarship into new European dimensions went unnoticed in Germany. The majority of the German medievalists were far from reaching the goal of a comparative European social history, as outlined by Bloch at the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Oslo in 1927,⁹ a circumstance that also accounts for the fact that the majority of German historians quickly made their peace with National Socialism in 1933.¹⁰ Only a few of them were actually official members of the Nazi party, but some, like Percy Ernst

⁷ Winfried Schulze, "German Historiography from the 1930s to the 1950s," in *Paths of Continuity: Central European Historiography from the 1930s to the 1950s*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann and James van Horn Melton (New York, 1994), 19–42.

⁸ Ulrich Raulff, *Ein Historiker im 20. Jahrhundert. Marc Bloch* (Frankfurt a.M., 1995); Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Was deutsche Mediävisten an der französischen Mittelalterforschung interessieren muß," in *Mittelalterforschung nach der Wende 1989*, ed. Michael Borgolte (Munich, 1995), 89–127.

⁹ Marc Bloch, "Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes" (1928), in id., *Mélanges historiques*. 2 vols. (Paris, 1963; repr. 1983), vol. 1, 16–40.

¹⁰ Karl Ferdinand Werner, *Das NS-Geschichtsbild und die deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1967); Klaus Schreiner, "Führertum, Rasse, Reich. Wissenschaft von der Geschichte nach der nationalsozialistischen Machtergreifung," in *Wissenschaft im Dritten Reich*, ed. Peter Lundgreen (Frankfurt a.M., 1985), 163–252.

Schramm,¹¹ nevertheless expressly agreed with the policies of the new regime.¹²

Geary also accurately describes the emigration situation after 1933.¹³ He furthermore pinpoints the consequences for medieval scholarship that arose because many of the émigrés had changed their scientific focus. In some instances, the results were positive, as in the case of Ernst H. Kantorowicz. As *the* eminent historian of the George Circle, Kantorowicz was an uncompromising opponent of the Weimar Republic, as can be seen from his first major work, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, published in 1927.¹⁴ Later, in the United States, he adopted entirely different political convictions and scientific principles and, because of this, also devoted himself to different research goals in medieval history.

The changes in the approach to medieval studies associated with the emigration situation also had, however, negative consequences for medieval scholarship. Take, for instance, Hans Baron. Baron was a prominent representative of Renaissance research, which was, at that time, still rooted in the field of medieval studies. However, after his emigration, he devoted his

¹¹ Joist Grolle, *Der Hamburger Percy Ernst Schramm—ein Historiker auf der Suche nach der Wirklichkeit* (Hamburg, 1989).

¹² Karen Schönwälder, *Historiker und Politik. Geschichtswissenschaft im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt a.M/New York, 1992).

¹³ Hartmut Lehmann and James J. Sheehan, eds., *An Interrupted Past: German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933* (New York, 1991).

¹⁴ Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Das Mittelalter als Waffe. Ernst H. Kantorowicz' 'Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite' in den politischen Kontroversen der Weimarer Republik," in: id., *Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeichen des Historismus. Studien zu Problemgeschichten der Moderne* (Göttingen, 1996, forthcoming).

energy more to political philosophy and modern history.¹⁵ Like Hans Baron, in fact all the leading representatives of Renaissance scholarship left Germany, including Paul Oskar Kristeller, Felix Gilbert, Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl, and Edgar Wind. And they did not have many students left in Germany. Since 1933 Renaissance scholarship of this kind has not been done in Germany. It is remarkable that even after 1945, this development has received little attention in Germany and has gone completely unnoticed in medieval studies.¹⁶

II

These forms of German medieval scholarship—which greatly limited, if not made completely impossible, its influence outside Germany—were already observed by critics at that time. Marc Bloch, an excellent authority on German medieval scholarship and on German history in general, characterized the *differentia specifica* that irritated him about German medieval and modern historians in his debates with Georg von Below and Friedrich Meinecke between the two world wars. The reason for the entirely different character of German historians and even their inability to embrace new concepts, in his view, was their adoration of the state, “*le culte de l'État.*”¹⁷

¹⁵ Cf. Hans Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism: Essays on the Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought*. 2 vols. (Princeton, 1988).

¹⁶ Horst Günter, "Hans Baron und die emigrierte Renaissance," in Hans Baron, *Bürgersinn und Humanismus im Florenz der Renaissance* (Berlin, 1992), 7–10.

¹⁷ Oexle, "Ein politischer Historiker," 309f.

Another historian picked up this topic again fifty years later: the Czech medievalist Frantisek Graus.¹⁸ Incidentally, he was also a victim of the German state.¹⁹ Graus very aptly pointed out the peculiarities of German medieval history. Moreover, by using the leading paradigm of political history, particularly of the constitutional history of the Middle Ages, Graus discussed these characteristics in their historical dimensions and talked about their long-term effects in view of a "*Sonderentwicklung*," a special development. According to Graus, this *Sonderentwicklung* is related to the fact "that there was no written German constitution." Graus argues further that, "in order to make the desired ideal of a unified German constitution real and concrete, one had to attempt to anchor it historically, to construct a historical constitution." In this manner, Graus continues, a model was created that became the foundation for entire schools of thought. "In order to be binding or to be able to influence the present, institutions had to appear long-lasting, had to grow out of the 'character' ('essence') of the people; the continuity had to be valid for all Germans (where at all possible, for all Germanic people) ..."²⁰

This model also refers to a specific form of German historical mentalities, which may be designated by the term *Historismus*. While in exile in Holland, another émigré, the anthropologist and sociologist Helmuth Plessner, posed the question of why the intellectual elite, above all the university professors, including the most prominent and famous, embraced National Socialism and indeed even significantly contributed to its establishment in 1933. He provided the answer to this question in his book *Das*

¹⁸ Frantisek Graus, "Verfassungsgeschichte des Mittelalters," *Historische Zeitschrift* 243 (1986): 529–589.

¹⁹ Marie Theres Fögen and Dieter Simon, "Frantisek Graus," *Rechtshistorisches Journal* 8 (1989): 233.

²⁰ Graus, "Verfassungsgeschichte des Mittelalters," 544f.

Schicksal deutschen Geistes im Ausgang seiner bürgerlichen Epoche (the fate of the German mind at the end of its bourgeois era), published in 1935 and again in 1959 under the rather misleading title *Die verspätete Nation* (the belated nation).²¹ According to Plessner, it was the lack of authentic historical traditions in the political thought of the German bourgeoisie that produced this excessive *Historismus* in the beginning of the nineteenth century and which existed particularly after the founding of the *Reich*. This *Historismus* expressed itself as a political medievalism, or as a perpetual reflection on the Middle Ages, that consequently took the form of a mounting criticism of modernity. After 1918 in particular, this medievalism pitted itself against the Weimar Republic.²² This was the case not only with historians but also, and even especially, among theologians, philosophers, sociologists, art historians, and legal scholars. This medievalism articulated itself as the hope for the dawning of a “New Middle Ages,” which many believed to have arrived in 1933.²³

In his book from 1935, Plessner explained that in Germany, in contrast to England and to the countries shaped by their Roman heritage, a close connection had never developed between the formation of the nation-state and the ideals of the Enlightenment.²⁴ In addition, he observed that, since the Romantic period and because of it, political enlightenment and political humanism were superceded by the myth of the medieval *Reich*, characterized as a distant “splendor hovering between memory

²¹ Helmuth Plessner, *Die verspätete Nation. Über die politische Verführbarkeit bürgerlichen Geistes* (Stuttgart, 1959), 15ff., 83ff.

²² Otto Gerhard Oexle, “Das Mittelalter und das Unbehagen an der Moderne. Mittelalterbeschwörungen in der Weimarer Republik und danach,” in *Spannungen und Widersprüche. Gedenkschrift für Frantisek Graus*, ed. Susanna Burghartz et al. (Sigmaringen, 1992), 125–153.

²³ *Ibid.*, 145ff.

²⁴ Plessner, *Die verspätete Nation*, 13, 29ff.

and expectation.”²⁵ In 1933, the prominent medievalist Hermann Heimpel formulated this idea as “Deutschlands Mittelalter –Deutschlands Schicksal,” or “Germany’s Middle Ages–Germany’s fate.” To quote him, “Germany’s Middle Ages are Germany’s beginning in power, splendor, and worldwide reputation.” Moreover, according to Heimpel, it is precisely for this reason that this “medieval beginning” is “also strong in the hearts of the people of the Third Reich.” Heimpel further asserted that “the feeling is alive that archetypes for German existence can be found in that First Reich of the Germans, in the Reich of heroic effort, of power and of unity, archetypes after which boys today model themselves and men act.”²⁶

In this context, another aspect must also finally be mentioned that even today profoundly shapes the character of the history of historical scholarship in Germany; namely, the complete rejection of *Historische Kulturwissenschaft* as it appeared in Europe around 1900.²⁷ The comparison of historiography in Germany with that in France makes this notion particularly clear.²⁸ In France, *Historische Kulturwissenschaft* is associated with the names Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, and in Germany with the names Georg Simmel and Max Weber, but also with Aby Warburg. Here we have a *Historische Kulturwissenschaft* that was conceived in different forms but in comparable styles. Moreover, it did not defensively turn its back on modernity, even on the crisis of modernity, but rather attempted to appropriate it, and precisely in so doing discovered new paths of research and new approaches. In France after 1918, those historians, such as Marc Bloch,

²⁵ Ibid., 15.

²⁶ Hermann Heimpel, *Deutschlands Mittelalter—Deutschlands Schicksal. Zwei Reden* (Freiburg i.Br., 1933), 5f.

²⁷ Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Geschichte als Historische Kulturwissenschaft," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (forthcoming, 1996).

²⁸ Oexle, “Deutsche Mediävisten.”

who were capable of learning what there was to learn from the catastrophe of 1914–1918, designed a new medieval scholarship and a new history in that they transferred the questions and issues raised by *Historische Kulturwissenschaft* around 1900 to their discipline. In Germany, on the other hand, we are still awaiting today a comprehensive reception of *Historische Kulturwissenschaft* from historians. As recent comments demonstrate, Max Weber is considered to be a “sociologist” by German historians, and Georg Simmel is even referred to as a “philosopher,” from whom a historian cannot really learn much.

III

In this discussion we have touched upon a broad range of topics. It is to Patrick Geary’s credit that he has explicitly drawn our attention to these issues. I am referring specifically to the interpretations of the Middle Ages upon which the scholarship of medieval historians is based and through which they link these epochs with their own time and with the modern age. It is important to devote our attention to this type of thought process and formation of ideas for two reasons.

First of all, in critically examining this type of thinking, we reach a deeper region, beyond a mere history of ideas and dogmas or a mere history of institutions. It is from this deeper zone that the mental steering of the approach as well as the selection of knowledge deemed relevant stems. This is especially true in regard to the problem of the relationship of the Middle Ages to the modern era as a construct of historical thinking.²⁹ The intellectual construct of the Middle Ages and the modern era, or of the modern era and its Middle Ages, or, better yet, of

²⁹ Otto Gerhard Oexle, “Das entzweite Mittelalter,” in *Die Deutschen und ihr Mittelalter. Themen und Funktionen moderner Geschichtsbilder vom Mittelalter*, ed. Gerd Althoff (Darmstadt, 1992), 7–28.

the modern era and its various notions of the Middle Ages, has played a central role in the piloting of scientific approaches in all the humanities since the nineteenth century, and it continues to do so today. The discourse about the medieval and the modern expresses itself in standardized forms of thought and contrasting concepts; for instance, individual and type, society and community, status and contract. The various Germanic theories are also included in this discussion and, as Geary has demonstrated, the medievalist versions of the New Frontier thesis as well.

It is also important to devote our energy to a critical examination of the thought processes and formation of ideas because, as it seems to me, it is precisely this deeper area of historical imagination that invites comparative and discerning observations. On the one hand, it entices us and leads us to recognize national models and patterns of historical interpretation from an interdisciplinary perspective. On the other hand, it invites a comparative understanding of the patterns of nationally defined perceptions and interpretations of history in different countries.

IV

Certainly, there were also innovations in medieval scholarship in Germany after World War I. There were new approaches, there was the desire to grasp the history of the Middle Ages better than ever before, or, in other words, as European history. This particularly applies to the largely neglected late work and medieval scholarship of Otto Hintze, formerly a historian of Prussia and the Hohenzollern. Hintze drew the same conclusions from the catastrophe of World War I as did Marc Bloch, who was his junior by an entire generation. Like Bloch, Hintze also recognized the need for a comparative European social history. Published around 1930, his treatises on, among other things,

feudalism or the emergence of the representative constitution in the European Occident translate this insight into historical discoveries and represent the first signs in Germany of a comparative history of mentalities and a comparative social and structural history of the medieval period in Europe.³⁰ One could also mention here the work of young medievalists such as Percy Ernst Schramm (1894–1970),³¹ Carl Erdmann (1898–1945),³² and Gerd Tellenbach (born in 1903)³³ at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s.

The progress that German medieval scholarship has made in the gradual development of such approaches since 1945 has been documented perhaps most comprehensively in the monumental work *Der Weg in die Geschichte* (the path into history) by Johannes Fried, which was published in 1994.³⁴ Along Fried's path, German medieval scholarship needs the accompanying critique of medievalists from other countries. Moreover, it also depends on the assistance and accompaniment of those who are

³⁰ Otto Hintze, "Wesen und Verbreitung des Feudalismus" (1929); "Typologie der ständischen Verfassungen des Abendlandes" (1930); "Weltgeschichtliche Bedingungen der Repräsentativverfassung" (1931), in his *Staat und Verfassung. Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur allgemeinen Verfassungsgeschichte*, 3d ed. (Göttingen, 1970), 84ff., 120ff., 140ff.

³¹ Percy Ernst Schramm, *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio. Studien zur Geschichte des römischen Erneuerungsgedankens vom Ende des karolingischen Reiches bis zum Investiturstreit* (1929; 3d ed. Darmstadt, 1962).

³² Carl Erdmann, *Die Entstehung des Kreuzzugsgedankens* (1935; repr. Stuttgart, 1955). Cf. Gerd Tellenbach, *Aus erinnerter Zeitgeschichte* (Freiburg i.Br., 1981), 82ff.

³³ Gerd Tellenbach, *Libertas. Kirche und Weltordnung im Zeitalter des Investiturstreites* (Stuttgart, 1936).

³⁴ Johannes Fried, *Der Weg in die Geschichte. Die Ursprünge Deutschlands. Bis 1024*. Propyläen Geschichte Deutschlands, vol. 1. (Berlin, 1994); cf. id., *Die Formierung Europas 840–1046*. Oldenbourg Grundriß der Geschichte, vol. 6. (Munich, 1991).

willing to act as intermediaries. Patrick Geary is one of these intermediaries and, in fact, has been for a long time. What is more, he performs this task as an American historian who has a comprehensive knowledge of and acts as an intermediary for European medieval scholarship on the whole. For this, German medieval scholarship is greatly indebted to him.