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The Varus Battle in the Year 9 CE – or How to Escape the ‘Memory’ Trap

Summary

In 9 CE, after almost 30 years of struggle in *Germania*, the Roman Empire suffered a tragic defeat. It resulted in the loss of the 17th, 18th and 19th legion and became known as *clades variana*, later as *Varus Battle*, *Battle of the Teutoburg Forest* or as *Hermannsschlacht*. Over the centuries the event acquired special significance due to its particular historical circumstances, the historical re-interpretations since the 16th century and the excavations at Kalkriese, which finally led to the erection of a museum on site. Thus the Varus Battle may fulfill many of the criteria for a *lieu de mémoire*, but a closer look reveals some constraints concerning the applicability and appropriateness of this theoretical concept for the event in question.

Keywords: Roman history; Varus Battle; Augustus; Arminius; battle field archaeology; Kalkriese.

Im Jahr 9 n. Chr., nach beinahe 30 Kriegsjahren in *Germania*, erlitt das Römische Reich eine tragische Niederlage. Die verlustreiche Schlacht wurde als *clades variana*, *Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald* oder *Hermannsschlacht* bekannt. Im Verlauf der Jahrhunderte erfuhr das Ereignis aufgrund seiner besonderen historischen Konstellationen, der Neuinterpretationen seit dem 16. Jhdt. sowie der Ausgrabungen in Kalkriese besondere Bedeutung, die zur Errichtung eines Museums am Ort führte. So erfüllt die Varus-Schlacht zwar viele Kriterien für einen *lieu de mémoire*, das Konzept weist jedoch einige Einschränkungen hinsichtlich seiner Anwendbarkeit und Angemessenheit für das genannte Ereignis auf.

Keywords: Römische Geschichte; Varusschlacht; Augustus; Arminius; Schlachtfeldarchäologie; Kalkriese.

In 9 CE, after almost 30 years of struggle for Germania, the Roman Empire suffered a tragic defeat against Germanic warriors. The unexpected battle resulted in the loss of three Roman legions, probably more than 10 000 men. The so called Varus Battle, 9 CE, was of course not the only defeat in the history of the Roman Empire.¹ Nevertheless it has acquired a special significance – not specifically due to the event as such, its particular circumstances, participants or consequences, but rather to developments that occurred far later: the historical re-interpretations of the battle undertaken more than a millennium later, the excavations at Kalkriese, which began in 1989, and the influence of the museum that was subsequently erected on the site. At first glance, it appears that the Varus Battle may fulfill many of the criteria for a *lieu de mémoire*. For that reason, some of the compendia of such sites published to date have accorded it this status, though without discussing the applicability and appropriateness of this theoretical concept for the event in question. However, as several arguments can be put forward against this ‘labeling’ the *lieu de mémoire* concept does not currently play a role in the external presentation of the museum in Kalkriese, nor in its marketing approach or corporate image.

This paper provides an overview of the event itself, its historical context and developments that followed it, as well as a general survey of relevant archaeological research and the main findings thereof. It also discusses the reasons for our conceptual approach and our reluctance to consider or promote the Varus Battle and Kalkriese as *lieux de mémoire*.

1 History and context

With the conquest of Gaul in the middle of the first century BCE, the Romans reached the Rhine and Julius Caesar declared the Rhine to be an ethnic and a political frontier between Celtic and Germanic peoples and not just a natural border (Fig. 1). Given this pronouncement and from a political and military point of view, there seemed little sense in attempting a further invasion. Thus the Lower Rhine was declared to be the new northern frontier of the Roman Empire.² In the political chaos of the following

1 The event went down in history as ‘clades variana’, the defeat of Varus, or as in the inscription on the gravestone of Marcus Caelius, the only known epigraphic evidence, as ‘bellum Varianum’, the war of Varus (Wiegels 2006, 503; Wiegels 2007, 12–13). In the 16th century CE, the event began to be popularly known as the ‘Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald’ (Battle of the Teutoburg Forest) or ‘Her-mannschlacht’. Since the discovery of Kalkriese the

term ‘Varusschlacht’, previously used only occasionally, has gained overall acceptance.

2 Through this sequence of events, Caesar created an ethnic-geographic division that had little to do with reality but did serve two purposes. First, it justified his military ambitions and strategies. Second, with the introduction of the term ‘Germanic’ he grouped together the various tribes beyond the Rhine and by doing so constructed a new (very dangerous) ethnic



Fig. 1 Distribution of roman military camps and settlement between Rhine, Donau and Elbe of Augustan (orange), Tiberian (red) or Augustan/Tiberian time (no colour).

decades, the new section of the empire's border was largely forgotten. After the seizure of power by Gaius Octavius, thereafter Emperor Augustus, and several military incidents, in particular the defeat of Lollius in 16 BCE, the frontier was fortified and troops from Gaul were moved to the Lower Rhine border to stop the frequent raids by Germanic tribesmen into Gaul. From 12 BCE onwards, the previously unknown territory between the Rhine, North Sea and Elbe was extensively explored, first by Nero Claudius Drusus (38–9 BCE) and, after his death, by his brother Tiberius (42 BCE–37 CE), who later succeeded Augustus on the imperial throne. What may have started as exploration, soon turned into military campaigns and conquest.³

power, located between the already familiar Celts and Scythians. With his description of the Germanic tribes, he deliberately constructed a scenario of intimidation, referring to the very well-known 'furore teutonico' and thus nourishing the Romans' deeply rooted fear of the peoples of the north, originally

engendered by the invasion and the battles against Cimbri and Teutons in Noreia 113 BCE, Aquae Sextiae 102 BCE and Vercellae 101 BCE (Dreyer 2009, 11–12; Pohl 2000, 51–56; Trzaska-Richter 1991, 78–80; Wolters 2008, 30–32).

In 7 CE, after several further conflicts and insurrections,⁴ the Romans thought they had broken the resistance and started the administrative process intended to transform the conquered lands into a Roman province. The man in charge was Publius Quin(c)tilius Varus (47/46 BCE–9CE), an experienced statesman and a relative and close confidant of Emperor Augustus. Among his first measures was the establishment of an administration, the introduction of a legal system and the imposition of taxes and duties. As the politician and historian Cassius Dio (163–229 CE) pointed out in his Roman History,⁵ these measures were not welcomed with enthusiasm everywhere. In 9 CE, while on their way back from the Weser to their winter-camp somewhere along the Rhine, Varus and his legions fell into the fatal trap.

According to written accounts, the Varus Battle was an insurrection led by Arminius, the son of a noble Germanic family from the Cherusci, a tribe which had early on established an allegiance with the Romans. Relatively little is known of Arminius' biography, but according to the information that is available,⁶ Arminius was probably educated in Rome and pursued a career in the Roman army. He acquired Roman citizenship and the civil rights it conferred and received military honors before returning to Germania. There, he met Publius Quin(c)tilius Varus, and the two became close friends. However, in the autumn of 9 CE, Arminius and his followers, probably men from his auxiliary troops, supported by warriors from other Germanic tribes,⁷ lured Varus and his legions in an ambush. After several days of fighting, most of the Roman soldiers were killed. Varus committed suicide.⁸ The 17th, 18th and 19th legions were lost. It was one of the Roman Army's least expected defeats, but it marked neither an end nor a turning point.⁹ The Romans did not give up their attempts to conquer the land between the Rhine and the Elbe until 16 CE, after having carried out revenge campaigns and several

3 For more details on Roman policies and military strategy in 'Germania' examined from archaeological and historical perspectives, see Deininger 2000; Kehne 2002; Kühlborn 2007; Moosbauer 2009; Welwei 1999; Wiegels 2007; Wiegels 2009; Wolters 2000; Wolters 2008.

4 The most important event in this phase is the so-called *immensum bellum*, which, in 4 CE, led to a new military intervention. According to Velleius Paterculus (Vell. 2.104–105), Tiberius subjugated the Bructeri and the Cherusci, while other tribes accepted new treaties. In this context Tiberius again reached the rivers Weser and Elbe and Velleius Paterculus stated "nihil erat iam in germania, quod vinci posset, praetor gentem Marcomannorum" – there was nothing more in Germania to conquer apart from the Marcomanni (Vell. 2.108.1).

5 Cass. Dio 56.18.3.

6 Kehne 2009, 104; Timpe 1973, 8; Wolters 2008, 93–94.

7 Timpe 1970, 49, 108–109; Timpe 2012, 641–642; for a critical comment on this see Kehne 2009, 105.

8 The reconstruction of the course of events is the focus of much historical research and has, together with the search for the location of the battle, led to a wealth of hotly debated alternative proposals (the latest being that of Timpe 2012, 625–626, 640–641).

9 According to the latest research, the battle should be considered more as an 'operational mishap' than either an historical turning point or a striking break, as it was seen by local historians and patriots in the 19th and early 20th century, and as even historians like Theodor Mommsen described it (Wiegels 2007, 9).

battles involving heavy losses fought by eight legions.¹⁰ The Roman troops were then ordered back to the Rhine, and their military commander, Germanicus, was recalled to Rome.¹¹

Tacitus' *Germania* and other Roman sources tell us that many different Germanic tribes of differing size and cultural complexity inhabited the land between the Rhine, the North Sea, the Elbe and the Baltic.¹² However, the archaeological record does not bear this out. The archaeological material from this area is fairly homogenous and shows only few differences, which allow a rough distinction among three cultural zones or archaeological groups: Rhein-Weser Germanen, Elbgermanen, Nordseeküsten Germanen.¹³

The Germanic tribes did not leave any written records. All information about their names, location, size, political order, social structure, customs and manners comes from

- 10 Two military districts on the left bank of the Rhine were defined and each of them equipped with four legions. In 82 and 90 CE, these districts were turned into the provinces 'Germania inferior' and 'Germania superior'. But in the first chapter of his *Germania* (Tac. *Germ.* 1.1) Tacitus stresses that the actual Germania is located outside these provinces, north of the Danube and beyond the Rhine. His text was published in 98 CE, shortly after Domitian's death (see above).
- 11 In subsequent years, however, events did occasionally result in Roman military interventions, as for example in 39 CE, when the Romans undertook a foray against the Chauci that resulted in the recovery of the last of the three lost legion eagles and its return to Rome. Under Claudius troops were moved from the Rhine (Strasbourg, Mainz, Neuss) to Britannia. The continuous raids from the Chauci, riots among the Cattans and the revolt by the Batavians in the following decades lead to an invasion of Roman troops. In 81 CE, right at the beginning of his reign, Emperor Domitian threw himself into an attack against the Cattans, not for territorial reasons but solely in order to reinforce the legitimacy of his power. The celebrations and honors upon his return were lavish: he was awarded a triumph (83 CE) and the honorary name Germanicus, and coins reading 'Germania capta' were issued. Only in the establishment of 'Germania superior' and 'Germania inferior' in conjunction with the reduction of the troops along the Rhine was there a clear signal that the claim to power on 'Germania Magna' had finally been abandoned.

- 12 Since the term 'German' itself has been retained in English up to the present day while the terms 'deutsch' and 'Deutschland' have not found their way into the English language, I will refer to the contemporaries of the Romans as 'Germanic', and to the inhabitants of today's Germany as 'Germans'. The term 'deutsch' probably derived from 'theodisk' or 'diutisc' and originally referred to the language of the common people as opposed to the Latin spoken by the elites. During the Middle Ages the word underwent some changes, becoming 'düdesch', 'teutsch' or 'tiuschen'. 'Theodisk' is still preserved today in the Italian word 'Tedesco'. In the 10th/11th century, the term began to be used to refer to the people who spoke the language and gradually began to take on a territorial meaning as well, as expressed in "tiuschen landen" (Schwabenspiegel 1274/75), das "heilig Riche in dutzchen Lande" (Memorandum der Kurfürsten 1452) or "des heiligen Römischen richs in tutschen landen" (Mainzer Erzbischof 1342). The plural form (German lands) remained in use into the 16th century CE and far beyond. It was not until the German Federal Act was signed in 1815 that the plural form disappeared completely and 'Deutschland' became the official name of the country. From the 15th century CE onwards the idea of the 'Reich' was connected with the 'German nation', as in 'Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation' – Holy Roman Empire of [the] German Nation. Accordingly, the word *Nation* did not at this time refer to ethnic groups, language, political principalities or a state-like institution but to a geographical context (all citations in Busse 1994).
- 13 Pohl 2000, 19–20.

Roman authors like Tacitus and others. For obvious reasons, their descriptions cannot be taken as documentary evidence. Instead they offer a well-composed blend of facts and fiction, clichés and *topoi*.¹⁴ Several historical sources contain references to the Varus Battle.¹⁵ Most of them were written long after the event though, and their authors probably made use of earlier sources,¹⁶ since lost. This may be a partial explanation for some of the discrepancies and contradictions in the different accounts. Writing on history was more or less understood as storytelling and was thus influenced by many factors. Or to put it in the terms of Quintilian's recommendations, these texts should be written as "poems without rhyme" and should serve "the memory of posterity and the fame of the gifted storyteller".¹⁷

Despite all that, the antique sources contain valuable information without which a reconstruction of the attempted Roman conquest of Germania under Augustus, and later Tiberius, would not be possible.¹⁸ The most detailed and, according to widely accepted recent research, most reliable account of the event is provided by the Greek author Cassius Dio.¹⁹

2 Defeat, triumph and memory

A comparison of the literary sources with official statements reveals some remarkable differences. The later authors did not mince words, calling the battle a defeat and thus "a spade a spade". Actual politics instead had turned the 'Germania-Project' into a story of continuous successes. Accordingly Drusus already received triumphal insignia and was honored for his actions in *Germania* by the Roman Senate with the cognomen Germanicus. Tiberius was celebrated as conqueror of Germania as well, and Augustus also let posterity know: "Germaniam pacavi" – I pacified Germania.²⁰ By this time the Varus Battle was long over and the whole political situation in Germania ambiguous to a de-

14 Pohl 2000; Trzaska-Richter 1991; Wolfram 1997.

15 Among the most important are Velleius Paterculus (20/19 BCE–30 CE) *Historia Romana*; Cassius Dio Cocceianus (ca. 164–229 CE) *Ρωμαϊκή ἱστορία*; Publius Cornelius Tacitus (ca. 55–133 CE) *Annals*; Lucius Annaeus Florus (end of the 1st–middle of the 2nd century) *Epitoma de Tito Livio*; Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (ca. 70–150 CE) *De Vita Caesarum/Divus Augustus*; for more details see Lehmann 1990.

16 Gaius Plinius Secundus (23/24–79 CE) *Bella Germaniae*, Historien; Aufidius Bassus (1st Century CE)

Libri belli Germanici oder *Bellum Germanicum, Historiae*.

17 Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.31.

18 One has to follow Timpe 2012, 637 who argued that the written records on the Varus Battle are not only crucial for our understanding of the archaeological record, but rather without these lively, contradictory and dramatic descriptions the archaeological excavations between the Rhine, Lippe and Weser would never have gained such widespread interest and attention far beyond academic circles.

19 Kehne 2009, 105; Manuwald 2007, 430–431; Timpe 2012, 627–628; Wolters 2008, 102–103.

20 R. Gest. div. Aug. 26.1–2.

gree rarely seen before.²¹ Even Germanicus, whose military campaigns had demanded higher losses than those 20 years earlier, received a triumph. In inscriptions like the *Tabula Siarensis* his victories were praised as was his recovery of the legion eagles, although one of them was still missing and in Germanic hands.²² The lush honors Tacitus described²³ were perhaps intended to hide the truth of how little had been achieved.²⁴ Tacitus remarked laconically “bellumque, quia conficere prohibitus erat, pro confecto acciebatur” – because Germanicus had been prevented from finishing the war, it was considered to be finished.²⁵

The three lost legions were never reconstituted. Whether the yawning gap was understood in terms of admonishment, commemoration or a mixture of both is not known. Publius Quin(c)tilius Varus, or rather, his head, which had been cut off by Arminius and sent to Marbod, arrived after this detour in Rome. There he received a solemn burial in the family vault, without any signs of disrespect.²⁶ The political careers of family members were not affected by his defeat. Only after the treason trials got underway in 26 CE was open season declared. From then on Varus was no longer seen as having been unfortunate as a commander but, instead, as having borne sole responsibility for this disaster. Velleius Paterculus was the first to draw the caricature of the inept commander²⁷ and others followed his lead.²⁸ The Roman authors had found a scapegoat. It was therefore not necessary to pursue the critical question of the actual causes of the defeat in detail.

The rediscovery of the third of the lost legion eagles (39 CE) and the later attack against the tribe of the Cattans (81 CE) by Domitian were also included in this propaganda strategy. Again triumphs were celebrated and the slogan ‘Germania capta’ was spread about, leading Tacitus to the laconic comment: “Tam diu Germania vincitur [...]” – so long have we been conquering Germania.²⁹ For Rome the Varus’ battlefield was no place of memory, not even a place for pietas or commemoration as demonstrated by the critical reactions to Germanicus’ funeral activities, 15 CE.³⁰ Although military defeats associated with the loss of legions’ eagles led to historical and political traumas, as for example the defeats against Cimbri and Teutons, Hannibal or the Parthians, they never became subject of commemoration, exhortation or warning.³¹

21 It should be noted that the first version of his report, which was probably written in 2 BCE, was later revised. Thus it remains unclear why the version published in 14 CE did not mention the Varus Battle. Either the event was not considered to be important enough as people may still have believed that the situation would soon be under control. Or including anything that might tarnish the report of the emperor was something to be avoided by all means.

22 Wiegels 2006, 516.

23 Tac. *Ann.* 2.41.

24 Wolters 2008, 134.

25 Tac. *Ann.* 2.26.41.

26 Vell. 2.119.5.

27 Vell. 2.119.3.

28 Timpe 1970, 124; Wolters 2008, 146–147.

29 Tac. *Germ.* 37.

30 Tac. *Ann.* 1.62.2.

31 Wiegels 2006, 515.

Whether and how Germanic peoples may have preserved the memory of the victory is difficult to answer. Only from Tacitus do we learn what might have happened after the victory. In the context of Germanicus' visit to the battlefield, Tacitus mentions the places of executions and the altars on which the imprisoned Romans had been slaughtered.³² Later he writes "caniturque adhuc barbaras apud gentes" – still today (in the 2nd century CE) the barbarian peoples sing about their victory.³³ How long this practice was continued is unknown as whether the site became a sacral place of commemoration. But recent research findings in this context may now shed new light on this subject. Thus the spatial distribution of finds at the site of Kalkriese is now interpreted as evidence for ritual festivities and the erection of *tropaea*, the ritual display of spoils of war, very well known from the Roman victory celebrations and depicted on various Roman coins.³⁴ There appears to be no evidence however of the long-term use of the battle site as a sacred place after the battle was over and the booty had been divided up.

3 The rediscovery of the Varus Battle

Though not completely forgotten over the course of the centuries, the Varus Battle did slip out of view.³⁵ Nonetheless the antique texts were repeatedly copied and preserved in monastic libraries. The main texts dealing with the Varus Battle were rediscovered in the 16th century.³⁶ These texts opened up a new perspective on the ancient past and on

32 Tac. *Ann.* 1.61.1.

33 Tac. *Ann.* 2.88.3.

34 Rost and Wilbers-Rost 2012, 52.

35 The few medieval texts that deal with the Varus Battle did not obtain widespread attention. These include the *Chronica sive Historia* (1143–1146) by Otto von Freising, with its chapter *Excerptum ex Gallica historia*, which drew on various ancient sources, including for example Cicero, Caesar, Sallust, Sueton and Orosius and medieval texts, supplemented by exercise of the author's own imagination, in which he located the Varus Battle in Augsburg. In this regional context the text gained some patriotic attention and was cited in other early chronicles, i.e. by Sigismund Meisterlin (1522), Adilbert (1516) or Konrad Peutinger (1520), with the result that the localisation of the Varus Battle in Augsburg had its supporters even in the 16th century until the pressure exerted by new facts provided by historical sources published in the intervening period became too great (Wiegels 2006, 519).

36 I.e. Tacitus *Annals* I–IV (1509 Kloster Corvey, printed 1515), Velleius Paterculus, *Historia Romana*

(1515 Kloster Murbach, printed 1517), Cassius Dio, *Ρωμαϊκή ἱστορία* (1548 printed in Paris), Florus, *Epitoma de Tito Livio* (printed circa 1471), Sueton, *De Vita Caesarum* (printed 1520). Tacitus' *Germania* was already rediscovered in 1455 Fulda and printed in 1472 in Bologna and 1473 in Nürnberg. The *Germania* did not deal with the Varus Battle, but it opened up the way for new perceptions of the Germanic tribes that went in two directions – one dealing with a generally new recognition of the Germanic peoples as brave and fierce in character; the second, inspired by the mentioning of Tuiscon, constructed genealogical sequences linking the origins of the Germanic peoples with the Old Testament – Noah, the Japhites and the Tower of Babel (i.e. Schedelsche Weltchronik 1493, Giovanni Nanni, better known as Annus Viterbo 1498/1552, Franciscus Irenicus 1518, Burkhard Waldis 1543). The three ancestors mentioned by Tacitus (Tac. *Germ.* 3) now became the link between Noah and Charles the Great. From the 17th century CE especially the work of Nanni as well as the Old Testament were no longer con-

the history of Romans and of Germanic people. The Germanic people came to be seen no longer as uncivilized vanquished hordes, but as pure, brave and virtuous victors, who had defeated the ‘superpower of antiquity’ – the Roman Empire. One sentence in particular was to have special consequences: “Liberator hau(d) dubie Germaniae et qui non primordial populi Romani, sicut alii reges ducesques, sed florentissimum imperium la-cessierit;”³⁷ wrote Tacitus thereby laying the foundation for the emerging admiration of Arminius. Neither the point that *Germania* had existed as a country only in the imagination of the Romans, nor the fact that Roman *Germania* had nothing to do with the territory that appeared on maps in the 16th century as the ‘Holy Roman Empire of German Nation’ could dissuade the contemporaries in the following centuries to declare Arminius the liberator of ‘the German Lands’.

A look at the 16th century map shows how this misapprehension could have arisen: the ‘Holy Roman Empire of German Nation’ was composed of more than 300 independent entities – kingdoms, principalities, duchies, earldoms, counties and free cities. Due to a lack of central power, any threat from outside, or any disagreement between neighboring entities, could turn into conflict, develop into conflagration and thus become life threatening. But the greatest nuisance of the time lay in the relationship with Rome, and specifically in the taxes levied by the Catholic Church and the extravagance of the papacy. Complaints on these issues set out in the *Gravamina Germanicae Nationis* (Grievances of the German Nation) 1496, were rejected with the argument that they ought to be grateful: in the view of Enneo Silvio Piccolomini, the later Pope Pius II. First the Romans and then the Catholic Church had brought civilization and wealth to the German countries, otherwise the Germans would still live in the depths of barbarism.³⁸ There was little to be said against this. At the time, the German negotiators of the *Grievances* were not yet familiar with the new historical sources that Piccolomini was referring to. At the Imperial Diet of 1454 in Frankfurt, Piccolomini, in need of military allies in his fight against the Turks, changed his strategy and praised the unwavering fighting courage and bravery of the Germans, as documented in the historical records by the defeats of Lollius and Varus. Thus Enneo Silvio Piccolomini was the first to introduce the use of historical records into political discourse and to demonstrate that one could use them to support any argument.

As soon as the first copies of the antique sources became available to a broader audience, this potential was recognized by humanists and proponents of reformation as well. They were the first to discover in these texts a radiant past, a glorious hero and brave

sidered as reliable historical sources (Hutter 2000; Hutter 2009, 164–165).

37 Tac. *Ann.* 2.88.2. – “He [Arminius] was undoubtedly the liberator of Germania and had challenged the

Roman people not at the start but at the peak of their power” (translation H. D.).

38 On Piccolomini and the ongoing controversy see Krebs 2005, 118–156; Münkler, Grünberger, and Mayer 1998, 167, 169, 236, 243; Doyé 2001, 588.

ancestors, all that described by Roman authors. The testimony of the ancient sources did strengthen the general self-confidence, and it supplied the political discourse with new arguments: Arminius had appeased and united the squabbling Germanic tribes. Their superior courage and bravery had enabled the Germanic peoples to triumph over their enemy. Hence, unity had provided them with the strength to defeat the enemy and to gain freedom. That was the first lesson to be learned from these records, and it fit in perfectly with the troubles of the time, when lack of unity was seen as the source of most political problems.

4 Arminius – as spokesman, advocate and hero

From this point on, Arminius stood at the forefront of the gallery of heroic ancestors. He also became a spokesman in political appeals. This is illustrated by a letter, dated 11 September 1520, written in Latin and sent by Ulrich von Hutten to Frederic the Wise of Sachsen,³⁹ which was immediately translated and circulated as a handbill. Referring to Arminius “der allunüberwindlichst und starkmütigst Held [...] der nit allein sein Ort, Gebiet und Vaterland, sonder die gantzen teutschen Nation von den Händen der Römer [...] erlöset und wieder in Freiheit gesetzt;”⁴⁰ Hutten called on the German princes and elites to join in the fight against the “weichen, zarten Pfaffen und weibischen Bischöfen” – soft, weak clerics and effeminate bishops.⁴¹ Of course, one ought not to overestimate the impact of these initiatives: few people could read at the time. But with these statements Arminius second career as a figurehead and advocate for the cause of political solidarity and unity began.⁴² His proponents did not stop merely at imagining Arminius as an ancestor: to demonstrate the close relationship, he was even given a German name

39 With his *Arminius Dialogues*, written in 1520 and first published in 1529 after his death, Ulrich von Hutten created a literary monument to Arminius. The Dialogues were written in the tradition of the “Dialogues of the Dead” – “dialogi mortuorum” – by the Greek author Lukian from Samosata. In a fictional dialogue in the underworld with Alexander the Great, Scipio and Hannibal, Arminius presents himself as an equal in every respect. Hutten praises him as one of the greatest generals in history and as one of the greatest heroes in antiquity. Ulrich von Hutten thus provided the arguments for the later enthusiasm for Arminius (Roloff 1995, 211–212).

40 “The most invincible, brave-hearted hero [...] who liberated not only his town, region and country but

the whole German nation from the hands of the Romans and gave it its freedom” (translation H. D.).

41 Roloff 1995, 214.

42 There were also some critical voices. Spalatin (1484–1545), a humanist and friend of Martin Luther, accused Arminius in his work *Von dem theuern Deutschen Fürsten Arminio* (1535) of being cunning, of having “broken faith, peace and truth” and rebelled against authority. But Spalatin also praises his military power and eventually finishes by honoring “the liberator”. Spalatin thus presents himself as good Lutheran, who deems rebellion against authority to be a violation against the order and the rules of God (Kösters 2009, 70–71; Ridé 1995, 242–243).



Fig. 2 Ambrosius Holbein (1494–1519), Detail from cover illustration 1517.

– Hermann⁴³ which increased in popularity in the late 18th and especially the 19th century.

As written texts only reached a few intellectuals, printed illustrations were of great importance in conveying the message to the illiterate, who, until the 19th century, made up the majority of the population. One of the first artists to take up the story of Arminius was Ambrosius Holbein, who, in 1517, presented an image of Arminius dressed like a lansquenet of the 16th century confronting Varus and the House of Habsburg (Fig. 2). Other illustrators, like Jost Amman or Hans Brosamer, showed Arminius holding the severed head of Varus in his hands, a reference to the biblical David and a story that was well known, even among uneducated people.⁴⁴

5 Arminius – between politics and entertainment

With the Reformation and an increasing number of religiously motivated conflicts, the centuries to come were marked by even greater political fragmentation. The wars of the

43 The circumstances that gave rise to the name Hermann remain obscure. The earliest uses of the name are found in the literary works of Althamer (1536) and Aventin, actually Johannes Turmair, who mentioned a “Hertzog Ermann auß dem Hertzogthumb jetzt Braunschweig” – Duke Hermann from the duchy now Braunschweig – in his *Chronica*, written from 1524 to 1534 (Kösters 2009, 61, 71). Another trail leads to the humanistic circles around Martin Luther. In one of his speeches (1536/1542), Luther speaks of the victorious Cherusci *Hermannus*

(Münkler, Grünberger, and Mayer 1998, 298, see also Ridé 1977, 873–874, 877–878). Also attributed to Luther is the exegesis of the 82nd Psalm (1530), which says that the name Hermann is derived from a translation of the Latin ‘dux belli’ into German, ‘Heer-Mann’, man of the army (Ridé 1995, 240).

44 With this motif the topic was again connected with the Old Testament and thus the ‘Stammväter-Debatte’ (see ref. 12), which had already begun (Hutter 2009, 168, 170).

17th century clearly illustrated the political deficiencies of the time, which were further exacerbated by the strict divisions among the aristocracy, citizens and peasants and impeded social and commercial development. Princes ruled with absolute power over their lesser subjects and any idea of citizens' rights, such as those written into the French constitution after the revolution, remained remote until well into the 19th century. But Arminius was not only used by intellectuals to promote their political ideas and hopes. Starting in the late 17th century, artists and writers discovered the topic and created fictional stories, novels, stage works and entertaining literature, with political messages occasionally hidden between the lines.

One early example is Daniel Caspar von Lohenstein who, in his almost unreadable 3000 page novel *Groszmüthiger Feldherr Arminius...*,⁴⁵ (1689/1690) appealed to the principalities to abandon their obstinacy, to overcome religious and internal political controversies and to show a sense of responsibility for their subjects and their country. The background for this daring and bizarre epic were the political conditions of the time: the great wars against the Turks, the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683, the constantly threatened western border, the attacks of Louis XIV, the occupation of Strasbourg in 1681 and so forth. To cope with all that, Leopold I of Habsburg, whom Arminius represents in the novel, needed recognition and support. Lohenstein was not asking the principalities to submit, he did not question the system as a whole, he was asking only for a voluntary recognition of the sovereign. The book's illustrator, Johann Jacob von Sandrart (1655–1698), translated the sometimes hidden messages of the author into succinct pictures (Fig. 3).

In the 18th century, new ideas came up, inspired by the emerging philosophy of the Enlightenment and aimed at overcoming feudalism, and these were directed toward the German nobility. Their extravagance, in particular, as expressed in the imitation of French lifestyle, fashion, art and architecture attracted criticism. Daniel Niklaus Chodowiecki (1726–1801), a popular illustrator of the time, was among the first to present Arminius 1782/85 as a sovereign with a heart, surrounded by his subjects and sharing their sorrows (Fig. 4).

45 The complete title *Groszmüthiger Feldherr Arminius oder Hermann, Als Ein tapfferer Beschirmer der deutschen Freyheit, Nebst seiner Durchlauchtigten Thusznelde In einer sinnreichen Staats-, Liebes- und Helden-Geschichte Dem Vaterland zu Liebe Dem deutschen Adel aber zu Ehren und rühmlichen Nachfolge in Zwey Theilen vorgestellt* is already a foretaste of the character of the book – a universal history, a national epos glorifying the Germans, a love story and a romance, in which truth is not really a key issue: Odysseus trav-

els through Germany to find some cities, Medea has taken a German duke as her second husband, Hannibal has a German mother and the Varus Battle is the pivotal point in world history. Lohenstein took the ideas for his novel on love and adventure from the French author Gautier de Coste de La Calprenède (Cleopatre, 12 vol. 1647–1658), who also became a source of inspiration for librettists and composers (Bendikowski 2008, 139; Kösters 2009, 109).



Fig. 3 Johann J. Sandrart (1655–1698), *Arminius und Thusnelda*, picture for D. C. von Lohenstein 1689/1690 illustrating the political dilemma of the time: warring Germanic warriors, threatening Romans and a helpless Germania.

Arminius' success and popularity was not solely based on his military triumph. The story of his tragic love for Thusnelda and the family quarrels following from that played a significant role as well.⁴⁶ His personal tragedy provided the shining young hero with a human side, and gave his life story the bittersweet touch of passion, romance and tragedy – an attractive plot for love stories and baroque operas that had appeal even to poets,

⁴⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 1.55–56.

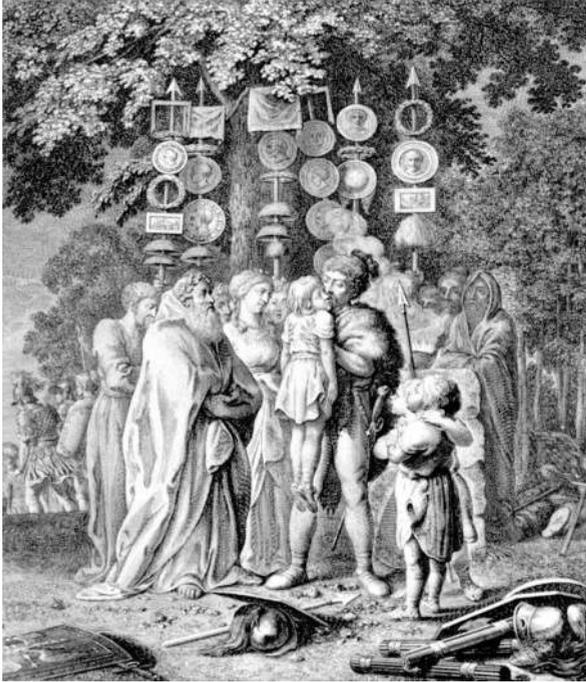


Fig. 4 Daniel Chodowiecki, Illustration for Klopstock's "Hermann's Schlacht", 1782.

writers and composer outside of Germany.⁴⁷ In addition to bringing Arminius into the realm of the theatrical imagination, and onto European stages, romance also made him attractive to a public that showed only little interest in simple warrior heroes. In these works, the actual historical event was completely beside the point, what mattered was Arminius – his courage, his bravery, his despair.

But the political dilemma and the central question remained. What is Germany and what are its constituting factors? "Deutschland? Aber wo liegt es? Ich weiß das Land nicht zu finden. Wo das gelehrte beginnt, hört das politische auf,"⁴⁸ objected Goethe

47 For example Georges de Scudéry, *Arminius ou les frères ennemis* (tragicomedy that premiered in 1642), Gautier de Coste de la Calprenède, *Cleopatre* (novel, 1648–1658), Jean Galbert de Campistron, *Arminius Tragédie* (love tragedy, 1685). These authors also had a great impact on librettists and composers, such as Heinrich Franz Ignaz Biber, *Arminio – qui dura la vince* (Oper 1687 Salzburg), Alessandro Scarlatti, *Arminio* (1703 Pratolino), Georg Friedrich Händel, *Arminio* (Oper 1736, London), Johann Adolf Hasse,

Arminio (1730 Mailand). For a complete list see Barbon and Plachta 1995, Appendix 1, in Wiegels and Woesler 1995, 288–290.

48 Friedrich Schiller, *Xenien* 1796; zitiert nach: Erich Schmidt / Bernhard Suphan (Hrsg.), *Nach den Handschriften des Goethe- und Schiller-Archivs*. Weimar 1893, Nr. 122. – "Germany? But where is it? I do not know how to find it. Where the scholarly starts, the political ends" (translation H. D.).

and Schiller in 1796 in their jointly authored *Xenien*, in which they argued for a cosmopolitan and enlightened view. Due to the lack of a political and territorial frame of reference on the one side and a growing self-consciousness combined with improving education and the ideas of enlightenment on the other, criticism of the feudal social order increased, and the search for a new social model continued. The questionable morality of the nobility should be replaced, it was argued, by virtue, reason and responsibility. But without any political clout behind them, the efforts were focused on the search for identity. The emphasis was on language, history and culture, and the intellectuals again drew on the antique sources to find the true German virtues there. Any sense of national pride and national identity was still absent. While bringing that to life, intellectuals and philosophers, artists and authors in the late 18th century slowly started to move towards a slightly excessive patriotism of a rather idealistic, romantic and enthusiastic nature. The resulting texts and pieces relieved the Germanic peoples again from any reproach of barbarism, considered them in some respect even as culturally and morally superior to the Romans, recognized in Arminius a national hero and role model and dreamed and raved about German unity and freedom or the German virtues of temperance, generosity, chastity, fidelity, courage. All this was put forth in the highly emotional tone typical of the romantic era, which, with its very specific sentimentality, kitsch and pathos, is difficult to stomach today.⁴⁹ Together with what was at the time a rapidly growing book market, Arminius and his victory left their marks in every literary genre – novels, love stories, tales for children and history books for readers of all ages became increasingly popular, conveying the story to the masses.

6 Arminius – from stage to battlefield

Up to this point, the reception of Arminius was indeed quite politically motivated. Writers and historians had used Arminius to deliberately touch what were obviously raw nerves, but all their efforts remained inconsequential, sometimes bizarre or even naïve – a romantic infatuation. However, the invasion of the Napoleonic troops brought about a radical change, and what had been no more than an enthusiastic passion for freedom and unity was now confronted with reality: Austria was defeated in 1805, the emperor abdicated, the battles in Jena and Auerstedt were lost in 1806, Prussia collapsed, the French troops arrived in Berlin and the *Holy Roman Empire of German Nation* disappeared from

49 For example Johann Elias Schlegel, *Hermann*, Trauerspiel 1743; Justus Möser, *Arminius – ein Trauerspiel*, 1749; Christoph von Schönau, *Hermann oder das befreyte Deutschland*, Heldengedicht 1752; Friedrich Gottfried Klopstock, *Hermanns Schlacht*, 1769, *Her-*

mann und die Fürsten, 1784, *Hermanns Tod* 1787. The works of Klopstock and Schlegel also inspired contemporary artists like Johann Heinrich Tischbein (1722–1789), Angelika Kaufmann (1741–1807) and Josef Abel (1768–1818).

the map. The social and political shortcomings, as well as the failures of past decades, now became obvious. There was no ‘Volk’ one could have mobilized against the enemy, because there was no sense of cohesion. But this was something that should be quickly changed. Two instruments were introduced: modernization and propaganda.⁵⁰ As resistance to the French occupation grew, the desire to belong to a politically united nation increased steadily, and Arminius played a very vital role in this process, as perceptions of him changed. Now, he was used as the impeller, the instigator, in short: the whip. He was the propaganda instrument and leading voice advocating one mission, one goal – the fight against the French and liberation – and hate became the new catchword. The now intended people’s war (*Volkskrieg*) required firstly that the established norms from the Age of Enlightenment concerning civilization and humanity be weakened⁵¹ and secondly that the term ‘Volk’ be filled with meaning. The friendship and love ethic of the 18th century was replaced by Ernst Moritz Arndt by an ethic of hatred. “He who cannot hate Rome, cannot love the Germans” – this sentence, which Schlegel had, almost incidentally, inserted back in 1743 in his drama *Hermann*,⁵² became a mission statement.⁵³ In countless poems and songs, Ernst Moritz Arndt celebrated hate as a virtue and a moral weapon to be used in times of war to mobilize the masses against the French enemy.

Ja ich hasse, es ist meine Lust und mein Leben, dass ich noch hassen kann; ich hasse innig und heiß [...] und darum will Hass auf Leben und Tod [...] und wenn dann das Volk, wie unsere Ahnen vormals, nur zu Keulen und Spießengriffe – das Franzosenungeziefer, das bei uns ist, würde bald vertilgt sein und neues würde nicht wiederkommen. So ist mein Hass.⁵⁴

In the end, ‘Hermann’s grandchildren’ went to war, and their victory in 1813 was celebrated as the ‘New Hermann Battle.’

50 The long overdue process of modernization was started and brought some major changes: serfdom was abolished, freedom of trade and urban self-government was introduced, Jews received civil rights, education was made compulsory, an independent judiciary was installed. The army was completely reformed, corporal punishment was abolished, the elite’s privilege to hold higher ranks in the army was abolished, etc. – but the spring of modernization only lasted until 1815, and at the Vienna congress clocks were turned back.

51 Dörner 1995, 87.

52 Schlegel 1963 [1743], 128.

53 In the same period, Heinrich von Kleist wrote *Hermannsschlacht* (1808). But his drama was largely ig-

nored, although he blew the same horn and in the phrases “As long as there is still one enemy in Germania, hate is my duty; revenge is my virtue” found a short and precise formula encapsulating the task that lay ahead. He had to wait more than 100 years before his message and his language really fitted the time.

54 Arndt 1813, 438. – “Yes, I hate, it is my pleasure and my life that I can still hate: I hate fervently and hot [...] and thus want to hate life and death [...] and if the people would take up only clubs and spears, as our ancestors once did, – the French vermin that are in our land would soon be destroyed, and new vermin would not come back. Such is my hatred” (translation H. D.).

With the defeat of Napoleon in 1813, the map of Europe had to be re-drawn. The Reform movement hoped for a united German nation, but the nobility saw to their interests first. The newly founded German Confederation, created at the Congress in Vienna in 1815, was still comprised of 39 independent states. Political participation, civil rights, freedom of the press and all the other social and political changes that had been introduced in the few years since the invasion of the Napoleonic troops, were taken back. Disappointed, proponents of the reform movement retreated to their 'Biedermeier' homes.

For the next decades, two images of Arminius co-existed: an aggressive and a liberal version. The latter gained importance in the emancipation movement of the 19th century. But with that movement's defeat in 1848/49 and the wars against Austria, Denmark and France beginning in 1862, the liberal national idea faded away. What remained was an aggressive nationalism with Arminius at the fore and at the top. Art was promoted as a didactic tool for teaching history to the general public. Large oil paintings were intended to make the public aware of the parallels between past and present. Thus Arminius 'conquered' schools, living rooms and public buildings, like, for example, the town hall of Krefeld, where Peter Janssen created a sequence of eight large-scale oil paintings on the Varus Battle from 1870–1873. Janssen received the commission in 1869, by a jury that had assessed the historical-patriotic timeliness of his ideas, and the artist had left no room for doubt that he had the German-French war in view (Fig. 5).

7 Arminius – a monumental hero

Though other memorials to Arminius had been planned before, like the one by Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1813/1814), only the Hermann Monument in Detmold, created by Ernst von Bandel, was actually realized (Fig. 6). By the time it was finished in 1875, its creation had taken 55 years. The monument had seen all the political shifts of the 19th century and was now perceived as symbolically representing the Emperor, although the idea behind it went back to the invasion by Napoleonic troops at the beginning of the century. The young Ernst von Bandel (1800–1876) had presented the first designs back in 1819, but construction did not actually begin until 1837, made possible by the fund-raising efforts of civil associations, historical societies, political parties and patriotic circles, women's associations and liberal reform clubs from 1820 to 1848, which saw the monument as a symbol of the idea of a modern German civil society. The speeches given upon completion of the pedestal in 1841 referred to a peaceful co-existence of nations and the cosmopolitan meaning of the monument,⁵⁵ and the main speaker, Moritz

55 Kösters 2009, 238.



Fig. 5 Peter Janssen (1844–1908), *Der siegreich vordringende Hermann*, Wall-painting for the Townhall Krefeld 1870–1873.

Leopold Petri, a municipal councilor in Detmold, even stressed Arminius' democratic impact: as he saw it, the victory of Arminius had liberated all peoples of the world by introducing a concept of freedom that “abolished differences between masters and slaves as well as between citizens and foreigners”⁵⁶, thereby serving the cause of peace and harmony among peoples.⁵⁷ Thus Petri provides an example of how exaggeration and the exuberance of enthusiasm for Hermann and the Varus Battle could also swing towards a liberal direction.

With the suppression of the revolutionary movement in 1848/49, fundraising stopped, and so did the building work. It was not until the German Wars of Unification (1864–1871) that donations began to flow in again. Thanks to a generous cash injection from Wilhelm I, the work was finally completed and the monument unveiled in 1875, in the Emperor's presence. One inscription reads “Germany's unity is my strength / my strength is Germany's might.” Having undergone another shift in meaning, the monument was now seen as a symbol of glory, of military power, as representing the emperor,

56 Petri 1842, 7.

57 Petri 1842.



Fig. 6 Hermann's Monument, near Detmold.

as a gesture in stone and metal threatening the archenemy, France, and as a warning to all potential enemies of the 'reborn' German Nation as well. Four years after the foundation of the German Empire at Versailles in 1871, the national euphoria reached its peak. Arminius was a national hero and his victory in the Varus Battle became the mythical foundation of the Reich, now demonstrated by his widely visible monument. The enemy had been defeated, the nation had been founded. The mission of Arminius was fulfilled. From that point on, his gloss began to slowly fade, and the myth started to lose its great unifying social power.⁵⁸ In the two decades after 1871, a wide variety of interest groups claimed Arminius and the monument for their particular goals. It was put in the service of defaming Catholics, Socialists, Jews and Democrats, with a growing emphasis on racist and anti-Semitic issues.⁵⁹

58 Doyé 2001, 599.

59 Mellies and Migdalski 2012, 112.

8 The search for the battle site

Although Arminius began to lose some of his unifying power after 1875, the importance of the historical Arminius, which had been almost secondary in the previous centuries, was slowly growing. In the course of the 19th century, history had become a leading academic discipline,⁶⁰ and was represented by historians like Johann Gustav Droysen, Heinrich von Sybel, Heinrich von Treitschke or Theodor Mommsen, who were committed to history and to politics. The political goal had been achieved – the nation had been founded – now the history of the Varus Battle could finally come into focus. Facts were needed to provide historical authenticity to the myth.⁶¹ Against this background, the search for the site of the battlefield gained popularity. Accordingly, the numbers of publications on the subject increased, coming to an initial peak between 1870 and 1880, with further peaks to follow. Theodor Mommsen reopened the discussion with the publication of his essay *Zur Örtlichkeit der Varusschlacht* (1885) and his proposal of Barenau-Kalkriese as the location of the battlefield. The search was not followed only by professionals; local historians and the public took a vivid interest as well.

Research concentrated on the region between Detmold, Paderborn and Münster, resulting in the emergence of four region-based theories:⁶² the Lippe theory, the Münster theory, the south theory (South of Münsteraner Bucht) and the north theory (Wiehengebirge/Weserbergland), with Theodor Mommsen the most prominent advocate of the lattermost. But even Mommsen's theory was not able to win general acceptance, despite the fact that it was based on a considerable number of Roman coins. Critics complained about the lack of evidence like, for example, Roman weapons. Hundreds of suggestions were made, leading Friedrich Koepp in 1927, with regard to the floods of proposals, to make the ironic remark: "The shade of Arminius still wanders around, taking terrible revenge on his grandchildren."⁶³ In most cases, the ideas were based on the historical records, despite the fact that these did not offer any relevant clues, place names, landscape or topographical information. No sound evidence, such as archaeological remains, was discovered at any of the locations under consideration.

60 Dörner 1995, 151.

61 Dörner 1995, 160.

62 Von Petrikovits 1966, 174. Though this regional limitation did not come up in the 19th century, it actually went back to a publication of Pastor and chronicler Johannes Piderit (1559–1639), who simply designated the "Lippischen, Dithmoldischen und Hörnschen Wald" – three forest areas – as "teutoburgiensi saltu", thus referring to Tacitus (Tac. *Ann.* 1.60.3) who had given this name to the place of battle without describing its location. With the pub-

lication "Monumenta Paderbornensia" (1669) by Prince Bishop of Paderborn Ferdinand von Fürstenberg, the "Teutoburger Wald" was first marked on maps, again without any evidence. The naming was completely arbitrary, but this was soon forgotten. With the erection of the monument, most people thought – and some still do today – that it had been placed more or less at the site of the battle, because the area was now considered to be Tacitus' Teutoburger Wald.

63 Wiegels 2007, 8.

9 Arminius and the wars

Although the question concerning the site of the battle had to remain unanswered, the mythical Arminius managed a ‘grand comeback’ with the end of World War I. After the defeat, Arminius was the first voice in the myth of the ‘stab in the back.’ Afterwards, he joined the chorus against the Weimar Republic, and while democratic forces lost any interest in the Hermann monument, it now became a popular place for the meetings and assemblies of nationalist, ‘völkische’ and anti-Semitic groups and associations. The 50th anniversary of the erection of the monument (1925) was used to attack the Treaty of Versailles, and the monument became a weapon in the hand of radical right wing elites⁶⁴ as the frequent meetings there of the Stahlhelm, Jungdeutschen Orden and others demonstrate. In the 1930s, Arminius was used by the Nazis as a crucial instrument in election propaganda. Once victorious, they had no more need of this strategy however. Germany now had one ‘Führer’, a second one would have been superfluous, all the more so as Adolf Hitler was far from being interested in prehistory. Still, in 1942, he let his listeners know: “Unser Land war ein Saustall, durch das sie höchstens durchgezogen sind. Wenn man uns nach unseren Vorfahren fragt, müssen wir immer auf die Griechen hinweisen.”⁶⁵ Arminius was no longer at the center of historical consciousness. He did, of course, remain an integral constituent of the historical narrative though. After all, the myth was so well established in the public consciousness, that no further promotion was needed. Thus, the application by the mayor of Detmold that the Hermann Monument be declared a place of national pilgrimage was rejected on 13 May 1933 by the Reich Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. The foreign policy situation at the time, and particularly the ties with Rome, also argued against a stronger promotion of the Varus Battle however. To avoid irritation during the 1936 visit by Mussolini, the monument was left off the list of sightseeing destinations.⁶⁶ Moreover, Wilhelmine monuments hardly seemed suited to the image building of a new era and its claim for power. New and – above all – specifically Nazi symbols were needed and consequently developed. In this context, the Varus Battle had lost its importance.⁶⁷

64 Dörner 1995, 250: Three aspects in particular attracted these groups: a) story and monument were used to mobilize people against the French, b) the murder of Arminius was changed into the ‘myth of the stab in the back’ and c) Arminius as leading figure was an example for a successful leader and thus an argument against parliamentarianism.

65 Jochmann 1980, 213–214. Transl.: Our country was a pigsty, at most one they only passed through. When someone asks us about our ancestors, we have to refer to the Greeks.

66 Doyé 2001, 600.

67 The only exception refers to the redesign of the Gallery of the Reichskanzlei. Hitler wanted the 146m-long corridor to be decorated with large tapestries measuring 5.4 to 10 m. The tapestries should show eight fateful battles of German history, starting with the Varus Battle. Design and workmanship were planned according to the model of Versailles and its *Galerie des Batailles*, opened in 1837. This project was never realized.

But one artwork from the 19th century did become a sensation at this time: Heinrich von Kleist's *Hermannsschlacht*. Written in 1808 while Kleist was under the impression of the invasion of Napoleon, the stage drama was largely ignored in the 19th century. Its language and content was rejected by audiences then due to its cruelty and brutality. The stage drama was rediscovered during World War I though, when the latest news from the front were read to the audience during the performances. And every soldier was urged to take the book to heart as a 'wonderful patriotic rage,' because after reading such a book they would "conquer a hundred times over."⁶⁸ But it was only after 1933 that Kleist was discovered as the poet of the time. Kleist's discourse of hatred was now linked with the race issue⁶⁹ and Arminius was seen as the first person who had led the breed of the north against the peoples of the Mediterranean and thus prevented racial mixing.⁷⁰ "Kleist's battle call is our battle call and his song of revenge is our retaliation," wrote the press, and the Kleist Week in Bochum 1936 celebrated Kleist as "a milestone in the history of the national socialist theatre."⁷¹ Kleist's hate and revenge discourse was perfectly suited to the contemporary rhetoric. Twenty theatres had already included *Hermannsschlacht* in their program by the 1932/1933 season, in 1934/1935 the play was performed on 150 stages.

After 1945, the political Arminius was virtually dead, and the few attempts to return him to the stage are almost negligible compared to those of previous centuries. In the 1950s and 1960s the monument served as a rallying point for the Federation of the Expellees and the *Free Democratic Party* (FDP), with their appeal for "Unity in Freedom and reunification" (17 June 1954). The 75th anniversary obtained only local significance as all the prominent figures from the political scene declined to attend. Today the monument enjoys unbroken popularity as a visitor attraction and as the most impressive and spectacular monument of the 19th century.⁷²

In the former GDR developments took a slightly different course. Engels had commented positively on Arminius and had stated that suppression justifies any means.⁷³ Accordingly the Germanic peoples were seen as 'Genossen' – comrades – who had defeated the 'Sklavenhaltergesellschaft' – slave-owning society – in order to rescue their social-economic autonomy. But this was only one aspect. The second was linked to the unity of the German nation. Until well into the 1950s the idea of detaching the FRG from its Western partners and creating a pan-German country in the GDR mould still persisted. This was the message linked to the performance of Kleist's *Hermannsschlacht*

68 Unverfehrt 1981, 336.

69 See also Alfred Rosenberg back in 1927 in *Völkischer Beobachter* on the performance of the 'Hermannsschlacht' in the Münchener Prinzregententheater and his conclusions on the meaning of the text for the national socialist movement. Text reprinted in Rühle 1988, 823.

70 Doyé 2001, 599.

71 Dörner 1995, 253.

72 Mellies and Migdalski 2012, 114–115.

73 Engels 1962, 442, 446. "Die Mittel aber, die man zur Unterjochung anwendet, müssen auch gestattet sein zur Abwerfung des Jochs" (Engels 1962, 446).

during the Deutsche Festspiele at the Harzer Bergtheater, 1957, directed by Curt Treppe. To ensure that everybody would understand the political message intended, the program booklet gave following guidance:

1. Rom, das ist uns Amerika, 2. Die entzweiten und von Rom gegeneinander gehetzten zum Bruderkrieg aufgestachelten Völker: das ist der deutsche Westen und der deutsche Osten; und vor allem die deutschen Arbeiter in Ost und West.
3. Aristan: das ist uns Adenauer und Co. 4. Das Verzeihen und Vergessen zwischen den betrogenen und in die Irre geführten deutschen Brüdern und Hermann – so wollen wir es auch halten, wenn erst die deutsche Einheit erkämpft ist.⁷⁴

In West Germany almost 40 years passed before Kleist's *Hermannsschlacht* returned to the stage. The first performance, given in Bochum in 1982 with Claus Peymann directing, was inspired by the Middle American struggles for freedom in the 1980s and the idea of Arminius as a person trapped in a circle of violence.

In summary: from the 16th to the 20th century the perception and propagandistic use of Arminius underwent remarkable shifts. Arminius helped people to overcome feelings of cultural inferiority; he promoted idealistic patriotic concepts and the ideas of enlightenment. He supported the struggle against Napoleon, coached liberal reforms and civil emancipation and then turned into a political firebrand, an unscrupulous nationalist and a heartless racist before sinking into political obscurity. Today, Arminius has lost his political meaning and significance. This also became apparent with German reunification. Unity had long been the key issue in the Arminius discourse. Whenever unity seemed far out of reach, threatened, merely a vision or just a hope – Arminius had entered the stage. In 1989 reunification occurred without him though, and nobody praised Chancellor Helmut Kohl as the new incarnation of Arminius.

10 New discoveries in Kalkriese

There were several hundred suggestions made as to the site of the Varus Battle. But none of their authors provided any material evidence, and the descriptions in the historical

74 Programmheft des Harzer Bergtheaters in Thale. Heinrich von Kleist, *Hermannsschlacht*, Inszenierung Curt Treppe, Quedlinburg: no publisher, 1957, 16; Dörner 1995, 260. – “1. Rome for us this is America, 2. The divided peoples, incited to mutual hatred by Rome and spurred toward a fratricidal war: this is the German West and the German East, and above

all the German workers in East and West. 3. Aristan: this is Adenauer and Co. 4. Forgiving and forgetting between the German brothers who were deceived and led astray and Hermann – we want to adhere to this path as well, once the battle for German unity is won” (translation H. D.).

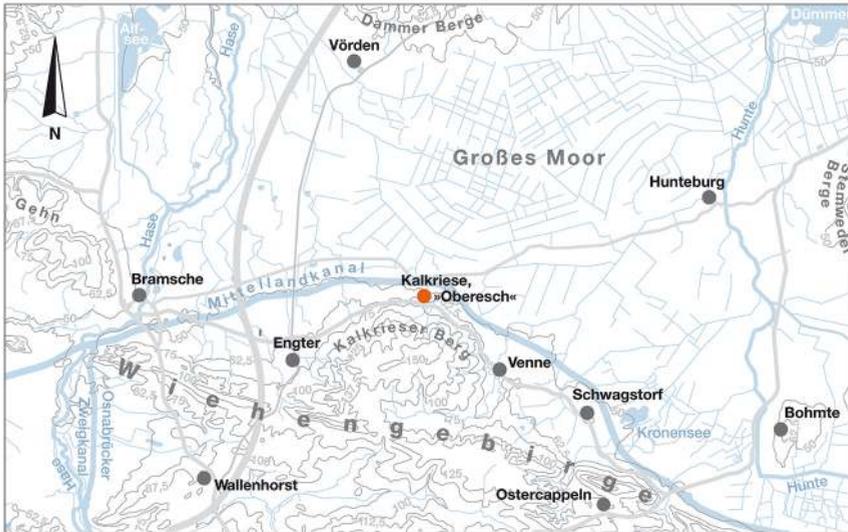


Fig. 7 Location of the main site – the Oberesch – on the northern slope of the hill of Kalkrieser Mound and the Great Moor.

records were too vague to allow any sound conclusions to be drawn. So it came as quite a surprise when, in the late 1980s, Tony Clunn, a member of the British army, discovered several Roman coin hoards and three Roman slingshots, and thus the first evidence for the presence of Roman legions, in Kalkriese. Excavations began in 1989, and since then Roman finds have turned up in an area of almost 20 square kilometers (Fig. 7).

The highest concentration of evidence for a battle was found at a site called Oberesch, which is today the location of the park of *Museum and Park Kalkriese* and is situated at the narrowest point between the hill called Kalkriese and the Great Moor. Excavations in this area uncovered evidence of a 400 meter long rampart, as well as skeletal remains and more than 5000 Roman finds, including weapons, military equipment, implements and tools, objects associated with administrative activities, medicine, transport and military life, showing traces of battle, plundering and ritual. The highlight of the collection is a Roman face mask (Fig. 8), made of iron and originally covered with silver, which was found only a few meters north of the rampart.⁷⁵

75 For a general description of the excavation and latest results see Harnecker 2008; Wilbers-Rost et al. 2007;

Rost 2009; Wilbers-Rost 2009; Rost and Wilbers-Rost 2012.



Fig. 8 Face mask of a roman helmet.

11 Planning a museum

It was not until 1993 that a link to the Varus Battle was officially accepted, even though the media was already promoting the idea in 1991. The first permanent exhibition opened at the site in 1996.⁷⁶ But the growing number of visitors soon gave rise to the idea of building a new museum. A controversial debate concerning the character of the institution ensued. Archaeologists, politicians, tourism experts and people living in the area got involved, and the suggestions ranged from a simple stone with a cross, to an anti-war museum to a recreational park. While in most debates the touristic impact took on more importance.⁷⁷ Politicians and tourism experts saw the site as a great opportunity to put Osnabrücker Land on the map. Nevertheless, one thing that was never part

76 Since 1992 there was a small information center on-site and guided tours by volunteers informed visitors on the progress on the excavation. In 1993 a first exhibition in the Kulturgeschichtliches Museum, Osnabrück, gave a general overview of the results. Afterwards the exhibition was presented in more than ten different museums.

77 In this context debates and workshops were organized, whose results went into several research works and feasibility studies, i.e. *Die Kraft des*

Mythos, Heithoff & Partner, Münster 1994; Kuhl (Unpublished); *Touristische Entwicklung um den geplanten Museumspark Kalkriese*, Workshop Ostercapeln 1997; *Tourismusentwicklungsplan unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Archäologischen Museumsparks Kalkriese*, Deutsches Wirtschaftswissenschaftliches Institut für Fremdenverkehr, München 1998; *Outline Design Concept* 1997; *Namenstest*, Produkt und Markt, Wallenhorst 1999.

of the agenda was making the site a venue for memory or national commemoration. There had already been enough emotionally charged remembrance, political misuse and propagandistic abuse, and nobody wanted to continue in that tradition. This kind of memory was to be avoided by all means.

A second aspect considered related to the latest trend in museum development: the modern archaeological open-air museum. First developed in the 1980s in England and Scandinavia, this type of museum reached Germany in the 1990s,⁷⁸ and open-air museums had been mushrooming in this country since then. Detailed reconstructions of Neolithic farmsteads, Bronze-Age hamlets and Iron-Age settlements intended to give visitors an authentic image of the past have cropped up almost everywhere. But though popular, now even academically accepted and well-tested, the approach is not necessarily appropriate for every archaeological site. A battle site is not just a place or a location, it is, more importantly, an event. What, then, should be reconstructed – the landscape, the rampart, the battle, the Roman soldiers, the Germanic warriors, the wounded, the dead? Secondly, the battle had not left much evidence to draw on in creating reconstructions, and the course of events was not, and still is not, completely understood. Thus, it became obvious that alternative ideas were needed. Without the decisive impetus provided by the Swiss architects Mike Guyer and Annette Gigon this experiment would have had little chance of success. But with their support, an abstract, purist and provocative concept was developed, one that deliberately avoided any of the images, associations or patterns of the previous centuries. The institution today includes a visitor center, a museum with a permanent exhibition and a large park – the former battle site and the core area within an obviously much larger landscape of conflict.

12 Visiting park and museum

Entering the park, one encounters a wide open space surrounded by trees that conveys, at first glance, an impression of emptiness (Fig. 9). The existing landscape was only partially modified to create the park. The landscape was seen as a multi-layered structure in which modern features should dominate, while relics of older layers would ‘rise up’ at certain points to illustrate the changes through time. Accordingly the major transformation

78 There were some highly ideological museums projects of that type in the 1930/40s, for example Pfahlbaumuseum Unteruhlding and Freilichtmuseum Oerlinghausen, with the result that this muse-

ological approach was for obvious reasons abandoned after 1945 and was long considered to be non-scientific.



Fig. 9 View over the Park at Kalkriese.

undergone by landscape since the Middle Ages, to the result of the ‘Plaggenesch’,⁷⁹ was not erased but instead fully incorporated into the concept.

The few structural interventions in the park, which are constructed of weather-proof steel with its typical rusty surface, make no attempt to imitate ancient or historical architectural forms and are thus immediately recognizable as modern buildings. No obvious information panels welcome the visitor at the entrance. Instead, information is presented in a restrained way and has to be discovered. Thus the park initially offers

79 ‘Plaggenesch’ refers to a method of agricultural fertilization practiced mainly in parts of northwest Germany. To improve the poor sandy soils, the vegetated top-soils from forests or other areas not used for farming were removed and taken into the stables as bedding for livestock. Then it was composted

and at some point used as fertilizer. This procedure was repeated every year. The soil that developed from these layers of composted top-soils is called ‘Plaggenesch’. The historical floor level of the battle-field now lies buried under a ‘Plaggenesch’ layer of up to one meter in thickness.



Fig. 10 Pavilion of Seeing with the museum building in the background.

a visual and a spatial framework, intended to encourage visitors to explore the site on their own, discover the traces and suggestions, and to stimulate their perception of their own imaginations and associations.

The park is divided into two sections: forest in the south and the archaeological-core zone, the battlefield in the north. The forest was partly replanted and, since the park's opening in 2000, has been subject to as little interference as far as possible. Small pathways lead through it, alluding to how Germanic peoples may have moved through their habitat and the potential this landscape, with its dense vegetation, may have offered for guerilla tactics of any kind. Forest and battlefield are separated by a row of iron bars, marking the course of the rampart discovered during the excavations. Parallel to the iron bars runs the path of iron panels, which symbolizes the westward march of the Roman troops into the bottleneck between hill and moor. This feature in particular seems to be quite inspiring, and it evokes very different associations. Some see the panels as grave-stones, others as an image for the Roman shields thrown away during the battle or as a metaphor for the Roman army slowly breaking apart. The visitors become interpreters, and the sovereignty of interpretation is shared between them and professionals.

As the visitors walk through the park they pass the reconstituted landscape and three pavilions. The reconstituted landscape is located in the middle of the park. In this limited area the 'Plaggenesch' was removed, allowing the historical surface to be seen, and a reconstruction of the rampart was embedded in the vegetation. This is intended to give an impression of what the place may have looked like 2000 years ago. The three pavilions are cube-shaped buildings: the pavilions of watching, listening and asking (Fig. 10). The

pavilion of watching does not show the battle, the pavilion of listening does not offer the soundtrack, and the pavilion of asking does not give any answers. “Die Varusschlacht is Vergangenheit, Krieg nicht. Warum?” – The Varus Battle is a thing of the past, war is not. Why? With this question written on the wall inside in mind, and the narrow slots allowing the view out onto the idyllic landscape, the visitor is left alone with his thoughts.

How does one visit the site? Well, one just walks in. There is no defined tour or path to follow and no emotional moods or attitudes are expected. Reverence, pity, respect, curiosity or interest – visitors decide for themselves how they want to experience the site, and they make their own choices. Most visitors do not come for national or patriotic reasons, and the very few who may be guided by such ideas are probably disappointed by the purist and rather un-emotional character of the setting.

13 Exhibiting the battle – a conceptual challenge?

Details on the general historical background, the circumstances of the Varus Battle, research results and excavations finds are presented in the museum. The first permanent exhibition opened in 2002. With the question ‘What happened 2000 years ago?’ at the focus, visitors were sent on a search for traces and were confronted with fragmentary evidence that had to be pieced together. The second exhibition has been open since 2009 and focuses on the facts and answers acquired so far. This exhibition is divided into six sections, one of which is devoted to the historical reception from the 16th to the 20th century. Instead of describing the overall concepts,⁸⁰ I would like to concentrate on the presentation of the battle.

One appropriate solution for presenting battles in exhibitions is the landscape model with tin soldiers. These models show many details and are able to depict even complicated battle strategies. But they are static and present only a single moment in time during an event that may have lasted hours or even days. For this reason many museums addressing military topics have replaced the tin soldier with films or computer animations. These media allow museums to depict the course of events and thus the dynamic character of a battle. But in order to visually depict complex series of events one has to have highly detailed information and a sufficient budget. If either the funding or the detailed content is unavailable, the whole video project boils down to some fighting scenes with five, six actors, a horse, screams and blood. This is then the battle! – in every respect a depiction that fails to meet any scholarly standards and produces only diffuse emotional atmospheres. This may be sufficient for the history channel documentaries that flicker on television screens daily, but not for a museum.

80 For more information see Derks et al. 2009.

In the face of a dearth of both facts and budgetary resources, and having adopted a general concept that focused not on the battle but on the research process and the fragmentary evidence, in our first permanent exhibition in 2002 we decided to confront the visitor with a completely different aspect: the moment of fear upon an unexpected attack from an individuals' viewpoint. The visitor would enter the exhibition space and, completely distracted by displays, objects and texts, would not notice that s/he was about to enter a 'bottleneck' and had already triggered a multimedia installation. The bottleneck looked like a narrow corridor, enclosed on three sides by something that appeared like walls with graphic décor, but were actually large projections.

Though marching Roman legionaries and a walking museum visitor have little in common, there are some parallels: both tend to develop a specific routine. On the part of the Roman soldier – marching through the seemingly endless gloomy forest, concentrating on his feet, his heavy pack, the undergrowth, the pace of the man in front of him, his thoughts already at the destination or elsewhere. The museum visitor for his or her part – more or less concentrated, taking a few steps, stopping, reading, looking, the next text, the next exhibit, the next interactive. Nothing unusual, nothing unpredictable is supposed to happen. But suddenly the floor starts trembling, strange sounds fill the air, oversized projections fill the room and obscure movements and dark shadows seem to approach from the walls.

The video tried to put the visitor in the situation of a single Roman soldier and to create the moment of shock, the sudden loss of orientation before one regains one's senses – the decisive seconds before the fighting starts. Fast camera movement simulated the first seconds, when the signal of danger reaches the brain and the body starts to react: at first confusion, then rapid eye-movements to locate the threat, uncontrolled movements and then the immediate reaction: fight or flight.

I don't want to deny that this presentation would have been considered as merely a rather conventional video art-project in the context of the *Documenta* or of any other modern art project. But for an archaeological museum it turned out to be a provocative and highly controversial experiment. Some visitors complained about the lack of story and the fuzzy pictures, others asked why we had not chosen a better camera man and again others told me that it was here that they first understood that the Varus Battle is not just history, that every battle, even one that happened 2000 years ago, is above all a dramatic individual and existential experience, a human disaster: in the moment of danger anyone, including a Roman soldier, is left alone with his fears.

Some years later our historical archaeological knowledge about the battle has considerably improved, and it seems clear now that the Romans were attacked while march-

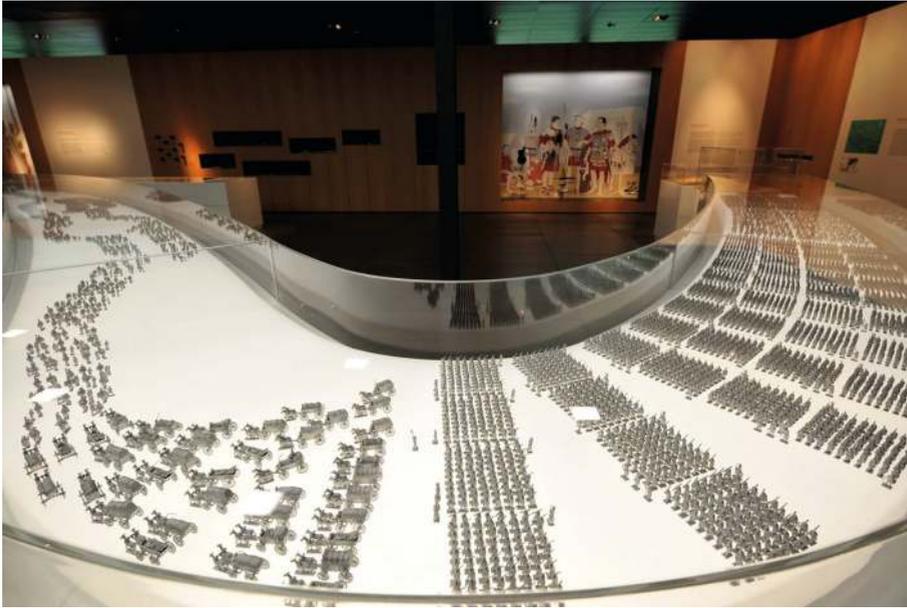


Fig. 11 Model with tin soldiers illustrating size and extension of a roman army on the march.

ing.⁸¹ Since 2009, we have been presenting the course of events in two different models. For the first model (Fig. 11) we returned to the good old tin soldier and show two Roman legions with cavalry, foot soldiers, supply troops, pack mules and carts. The first legion stands in formation, the second is on the march, in a display extending more than 10 meters through the exhibition hall. This model is based on the awareness that infrastructure in Germania was poorly developed. A legion on the march would have had to abandon its formation and, depending on the roads, ways and pathways, an orderly march could have degenerated into a vulnerable string of troops which could easily extend over 20 km through the landscape, thus offering guerilla fighters many opportunities for attack.

The second model (Fig. 12) approaches the question from a different angle, assuming that the Roman legions were still marching in more or less compact formations through the woods. A large box was constructed to illustrate what might have happened; it shows an abstract schematized rendering of the topography, all white in color, with the Kalkriese mountain on the left and the wet moorland on the right. The ground between the hill and the moorland is covered with notches and holes symbolizing all kind of dangers that could threaten the life of a soldier. Between the hill and moor, three lines

81 Moosbauer 2005, 93–94; Moosbauer and Wilbers-Rost 2009, 66; Rost 2009, 69; Rost and Wilbers-Rost 2012, 12–13.



Fig. 12 Model simulating the march of a Roman army through the bottleneck between mound and moor.

of round plungers have been inserted, symbolizing the Germanic fighters attacking the Roman legion from the mountain side. With the press of a button, around 2000 small metal balls roll in fairly ordered formation towards the impasse created, as soon as they arrive at the bottleneck the formation begins to break up, the plungers start to move up and down, increasing the disorder and more and more balls fall into the holes. No matter how often this experiment is repeated, no more than 30 balls ever reach the end of the impasse. The message is simple and clear: in tricky topographical situations, large numbers, rigid formations and hierarchical chains of command become a problem and, despite better equipment and military superiority, can lead to disaster.

Why do we present two models to answer one question? Because we do not have one simple answer. If no certainty can be established from a research point of view, an exhibition should not pretend to have definite solutions. This will not frustrate the visitor. Archaeologists are not the only ones who are stimulated by unanswered questions, they excite our visitors as well. With two possible answers to the question ‘What happened at Kalkriese 2000 years ago?’ on display, the discussion is opened in the exhibition room, and everybody can join in and think about pros, cons and plausibility. This and the hands-on research elements in the next section are intended to make it obvious that (a) there is rarely one key piece of conclusive evidence, (b) one therefore has to approach the question from different angles and thus (c) arrive at different indications, which may (d) make the one or the other scenario appear plausible or (e) just raise new questions. The

aim is for visitors to follow the process of research: they should recognize when or where the basic facts end and interpretation and supposition begins and then be in a position to evaluate the results or conclusions presented, despite the fact that our fragmentary knowledge often lacks clarity and precision.

14 Kalkriese – *a lieu de mémoire*?

In the last decades Pierre Nora's concept of *lieu de mémoire* has enjoyed growing popularity among historians in this country. Several compilations of such sites have included the 'Varus Battle',⁸² without, however, discussing the reasons for such a categorization. The existence of some historical importance, some political meaning or some prominence or popularity seemed sufficient to consider the Varus Battle a *lieu de mémoire* as the concept was defined by Pierre Nora.

Without a doubt, the Varus Battle is an interesting issue historically, the research work is fascinating and *Museum and Park Kalkriese* have a lot to offer. So, why do we not consider and promote Kalkriese as a *lieu de mémoire*? Why don't we exploit the advantages such a label would provide? In the ears of laypeople, the notion has a convincing, sublime and illustrious ring, but it also signals importance, true relevance and real meaning and elevates the place over all other important historical events, places, buildings, subjects. Any marketing expert would immediately recognize the competitive advantage this entails, as museums today compete on one market with other visitor attractions and have to fight for visitors by promoting their unique selling propositions. From a marketing point of view, it would seem rash not to do so, as the word would even intensify the already given unique selling proposition and would promote Kalkriese to the list of places everybody should visit at least once in his/her lifetime. Of course, Pierre Nora's intent was not to create a marketing tool, he was guided by other ideas and intentions, but in a public and therefore marketing guided domain the *lieu de mémoire* runs the risk of too easily degenerating into a simple selling point or sales pitch. However, for a museum like ours, which has to generate almost 50% of its annual budget from admissions, third-party funds, sponsors and other sources, this would be nonetheless worth for the attempt, as one should tap every funding source. So, why don't we do it?

In fact, the unbroken popularity of this concept and its wide ranging, metaphorical and vague definition or, to use Kończal's⁸³ terms, the 'elasticity' of the analytical category *lieu de mémoire*, seem to speak rather for than against it.⁸⁴ The event of the Varus Battle

82 I. e. François and Schulze 2001; Stein-Hölkeskamp and Hölkeskamp 2006; Hahn and Traba 2012.

83 Kończal 2011, 36.

84 In his abridged English version (Nora 1997), P. Nora defines a *lieu de mémoire* as "any significant entity, whether material or nonmaterial in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time

has, after all, left its marks in culture, in art and in politics, especially on the promotion of national identity – but when, where and for whom? The historical event primarily affected the landscapes between the Rhine and the Elbe. The reception history had its main impacts in the Protestant regions that later formed Prussia, and thus concerned the north, north-west and north-east of the present country. The rest of the German states showed less interest in the Varus Battle,⁸⁵ and occasional attempts to locate the battle in Augsburg or in other cities beyond the hypothesized areas in the northwest were little more than short-lived local patriotic marginalia. Neither the event, nor its reception concerns or covers what is today understood as Germany or as the Germans.

Secondly one has to ask, what, in the case of the Varus Battle, would actually constitute the *lieu de mémoire* – the battle, Arminius, the subsequent historical interpretations, the reception history, the excavation at Oberesch at Kalkriese, *Museum and Park Kalkriese* or all these diverse aspects together? This question may seem irrelevant at first, but not when one once again recalls the criteria for a *lieu de mémoire*. It is no coincidence, for instance, that the frame of reference taken in the available compilations on places of remembrance is national and the chosen events are drawn mainly from the last two or three centuries, thus the period in which the national consciousness of the particular nation was either developed or consolidated from which point it would be substantially maintained up to the present day.⁸⁶ These works are not just understood as a compilation of interesting historical facts or aspects, they are intended to demonstrate that our awareness of ourselves as citizens of modern nation states is not just based on the historical development of our political institutions or political frontiers, but as Pierre Nora

has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community” (Ref. 5, XVII). Referring to Nora’s original French version, François and Schulze offer the following definition: “Dergleichen Erinnerungsorte können ebenso materieller wie immaterieller Natur sein, zu ihnen gehören etwa reale wie mythische Gestalten und Ereignisse, Gebäude und Denkmäler, Institutionen und Begriffe, Bücher und Kunstwerke...Erinnerungsorte sind sie nicht dank ihrer materiellen Gegenständlichkeit, sondern wegen ihrer symbolischen Funktion. Es handelt sich um langlebige, Generationen überdauernde Kristallisationspunkte kollektiver Erinnerung und Identität” (François and Schulze 2001, 17–18).

85 The regionally limited degree of fame is nicely illustrated in the local farce, *Datterich*, written by Elias Niebergall in 1841. Hermann is first confused with Gutenberg then with Blücher, when the sly fox Datterich asks his drinking pals in the finest local Hessian dialect: “Hawwe-Se aach ebbes for des Her-

mannsmonement unnerschriwe? Bennelbächer: Wann ich des Geld zu fresse hett! Mir setzt aach Kahner ahns, wann ich emol doht bin... Spirwes: Warum will mer dann Dem zwah setze? Schmidt: Wie so zwah? Spirwes: In Mainz steht je schon ahns; es wer doch Der, wo die Buschdawe erfunne hot? Datterich: Nein, liewer Freind, des war e ganz Annerer: Der hat Deutschland befreit. Spirwes: Ganz wohl, des wisse mer aach, awwer er hot Blicher gehaaße, des wer der Maschall Vorwerts. Datterich: Aach net. Der Hermann hat vor lange Zeite geläbt un hot die Remer abkamesolt” (act 2, scene 2).

86 In this context, the following works should be mentioned: for Italy Insnenghi 1996–1997; for Germany François and Schulze 2001; for Austria Brix, Bruckmüller, and Steckl 2004–2005; for the Netherlands Wesseling and Blockmans 2005–2006; for Luxembourg Margue and Kmec 2007; for Russia Nivat 2007. For differences and similarities in concepts and approaches see Kończal 2011.

showed for France, is also founded on a rich amalgam of various and diverse aspects of history, literature, art, music, architecture, social and political developments, symbols, imaginations and others. As *lieux des mémoires* these aspects constitute new, no longer linear narratives but, to keep the image going, ‘memory landscapes’. Like conventional history compilations, this new concept focuses on the past and wants to contribute to the re-creation and re-confirmation of national consciousness and identity by creating a new canon.⁸⁷ Of course, viewed from political and economic perspectives, the importance of the modern nation state is diminishing, but as an interpretational paradigm for collective memories it is still fairly vivid, as discussions about the ‘European places of memory’ demonstrate.⁸⁸ Against this background it seems almost arbitrary when Nora’s concept, which has been criticized for its strong linkage to the idea of nation, but which is actually very definite on this point, is used or transmitted to contexts beyond this frame of reference.⁸⁹

As far as the Varus Battle is concerned, the event did not occur in a national context, particularly not in a German national context. The Germanic tribes of the 1st century CE were not a nation, and, as modern researchers never get tired of pointing out, they were not Germans.⁹⁰ It was not ‘the Germans,’ not ‘the Germanic peoples’ and not even ‘the

87 Several further questions arise from this: do the choices of the various authors really fulfill this aspiration? Who evaluates their relevance? Is it possible to obtain a somewhat definitive and representative selection, keeping in mind that this approach is guided by specific interests, intentions or the spirit of the time, and that at the same time, the people and thus members of a collective make their selection, and collective memory and identity are not static? Or is the main impetus to provoke a discussion?

88 See for example Cornelißen 2011, 5–16; Den Boer 1993; Majerus et al. 2009.

89 Furthermore, it is this aspect that distinguishes memory studies of this kind from those carried out within the context of oral history or oral tradition that are also dedicated to the past, but try to reconstruct it from personal memories of witnesses. Considering the memory boom of the last years, it is of course fairly tempting to use the term to dress up conventional compilations as well, hoping that the fashionable mantle may attract attention and thus increase sales.

90 One has to admit that the question as to when German history starts is difficult to answer. For that reason, most history books, especially popular ones, start nonetheless with Tacitus and the Germanic peoples, as this is the time span, when certain re-

gions or landscapes of today’s Germany enter the stage of history illuminated by historical records. Despite all subsequent efforts to explain that the Germanic tribes are not Germans, the impression that German history starts with the Germanic peoples is thus recreated repeatedly. One has to fear that, in spite of all modern research, the old patterns of thinking from the 19th century are perhaps more apparent and more deeply ingrained than one would wish to believe as “nichtprofessionelle Geschichtsbilder in der Bevölkerung” (Langewiesche 2000, 82). But from that it follows all the more that, on the academic side, one should avoid the use of any terminology that could support such misunderstandings or carry them even further. Against this background, one has to doubt whether the provocative irony in the title of the book *Der Tag an dem Deutschland entstand – die Varusschlacht* (Bendikowski 2008) will be grasped by most readers. Also the oft-cited, very snappy and intentionally sensation-causing notion of the Varus battle as the “*Urknall der deutschen Geschichte*” (Matussek and Schulz 2006, 168–172 and at the press conference on the occasion of the opening of the German History Museum Berlin, 03.06.2006) is in all its ambiguity rather counterproductive and was seriously criticized (Wiegels 2007, 15; Wolters 2008, 10), the more

tribe of the Cheruski' that defeated the Romans, it was Arminius, a man with Roman military training, and his auxiliaries.⁹¹ Since 1945, there have been many efforts in the spheres of research and education made to overcome this pattern of thought, particularly the ideology claiming an ancestral link between the present day Germans and the former Germanic tribes and the related assumption that there is a cultural continuity and unity of character reaching from the Germanic tribes to the present day. To consider the site of the Varus Battle in the sense of Pierre Nora as a *lieu de mémoire* of the German nation would be to re-couple it directly to the pattern of thought that governed the collective memory and the thinking of the Germanic/German people in the Empire of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, which paved the way for the subsequent fatal development of nationalism and racism. This is not made any better by giving it a new and more fashionable label. Using the term *lieu de mémoire* would again construct a continuity and thus be re-launching a historically erroneous historical myth with the help of modern terminology. Without a doubt, the Varus Battle would have been a *lieu de mémoire* in the 19th century, indeed it was much far more than that: it was the mythical foundation of the newborn German nation.⁹² But according to Nora, it is the 20th, or the 21st century and not the 19th century that should be the point of reference for this concept – otherwise we run the risk of transmitting or adopting long outdated ideas to the present under new labels.⁹³

One could of course object that it is not the historical event but its interpretation, the history of its reception that should be considered the *lieu de mémoire*. After all, the event did not acquire its meaning or start to anchor collective identities until centuries after it occurred. Yet, the process of re-interpretation, use and misuse also happened largely outside of a national context. Aside from definite historical effects and consequences, the Varus Battle is more than anything an example of how historical facts can be orchestrated and ideologically charged and adapted to suit current political interests. That is, in all its tragedy, not only illuminating, but, above all, worth knowing. But not all that we should know or should keep 'in memoriam' is or should be labeled a *lieu de mémoire*. Thus one problem of understanding arises from the distinction between knowledge and memory. For example: one should definitely know or remember the formula of Pythagoras (even if we rarely need it). But nobody would define 'memory places of mathematics' for that reason, despite the fact that mathematics has a tremendous impact on our understanding of the world. Not everything that is important and worth knowing necessarily, almost automatically, constitutes a place of remembrance or memory as well. Yet memory places have cropped up everywhere – in Nordfriesland as well as in Oberschwaben, in Oldenburg, Kassel or Stuttgart. The Dominican Provost

so as it became around 2009 the most cited formula in the popular press.

91 Timpe 1970; Steuer 2004, 363.

92 Dörner 1995, 155; Kipper 2002, 191.

93 Steuer 2004, 366.

Church in Dortmund has received the honor as has the Hamburger Kammerspiele, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and even soccer.⁹⁴ The frame of reference shrinks dramatically and with it the number of individuals concerned. Most of the SPD *lieux de mémoire* are probably irrelevant to CDU members and outside of Hamburg probably only diehard theater-goers are familiar with the Hamburger Kammerspiele. The concept, originally intended to provide a baseline or foundation for a collective national identity, now boils down to a label that can assure importance and meaning to even the smallest particular interest group. This may enhance the group's identity and thus be satisfying, but it leads to an inflationary use that devaluates the concept and is already leading the original conceptual idea ad absurdum. But the loss of the concept's diagnostic relevance is not the only problem, its arbitrary use also undermines the relevance of sites, events or topics that should indeed be considered as memory places of national importance. When World War II, the Holocaust, the national anthem and the fall of the Berlin Wall are lined up with Marlene Dietrich, male choirs, the 'calves of the nation' and 'only pots outside'⁹⁵, then one has to ask what such a collection is really supposed to tell us – certainly nothing about the quintessence of national identity – and whether the diagnostic instruments have been chosen rightly and adequately adjusted. Nora's concept has obviously given historical research a tremendous push by advancing an operational term to a new category and thus creating a new perspective of historical recognition. It is therefore all the more regrettable that its followers considerably increased a degree of arbitrariness already inherent to some extent in Nora's definition, with the result that now almost anything could be called a *lieu de mémoire*, as soon as somebody has included it in a list.⁹⁶

On the subject of the Varus Battle, one can say that the profound and highly emotional relationship to this event in the 19th and early 20th century has cooled off considerably. The Varus Battle is irrelevant for our national understanding as citizens in a reunited Germany as well as in a united Europe in the 21st century. Thus we are dealing here with what is now at the most a 'cold place of memory,' one that plays little more than a peripheral role in the consciousness of the present day.⁹⁷

94 Some examples: Schilp and Welzel 2006; Schilp and Welzel 2011; Hinrichs 2002; Hamburger Erinnerungsorte der Sozialdemokratie, Hamburg 2013; Borsdorf and Grütter 2000, 48–52.

95 This notion refers to the very typical custom in German restaurants of serving coffee on the outdoor terrace only in pots, rather than in single cups. Since the introduction of modern espresso machines, the sentence has become vanishingly rare and can now only be encountered in a few touristic 'hotspots' left over from the 1970s along the Rhine, the Mosel or in the country side. But from the 1960s and well

into the 1990s, this sentence was understood as perfect example of so-called 'typical German' inflexibility, stuffiness, inclemency and unfriendliness.

96 Critical voices have pointed out the arbitrariness of the concept (see Kończal 2011, 22–23; Den Boer 1993, 17; Judt 1998, 54; Schmidt 2004, 25–26) and its danger of becoming a "catch all category" (Zelizer 1995, 235) and pointed out, that "national traditions are invented to consolidate specific versions of nationhood" (Zelizer 1995, 231).

97 Raulff 2001.

Neither the historical Varus Battle, nor the history of its reception seem suitable to qualify as a *lieu de mémoire*, so what about Kalkriese – it is, at least, a place, a fact that could facilitate the communication and understanding of the concept in a public space like ours, and several studies have shown that space helps to preserve collective memories.⁹⁸ But until 1989, Kalkriese was only a tiny rural village in southern Lower Saxony. Only with the start of the excavations did it begin to receive more attention. Nevertheless, Kalkriese never did develop an ‘identity-promoting effect’ and it has not become a place of pilgrimage, nor one of emotive enthusiasm or national re-assurance. Instead, it got a museum that developed, over a period of ten years, into a tourist attraction and an ambitious center for education and research.⁹⁹

So what might happen if *Museum and Park Kalkriese*, despite all the arguments against doing so discussed above, were to decide to make a serious attempt to shift its self-image seriously towards memory or commemoration, i.e. not just for marketing purposes but as mission statement? Today, we see ourselves as a modern and very lively forum for education, research and debate, particularly concerning the nature of the site. The question of whether this really represents the site of the Varus Battle is still open for discussion. This is, firstly, one of the main impetuses for the ongoing research. Secondly, it is the main reason that we present the findings in our exhibition not as proof, but as an evidence obtained so far, evidence which might render a certain interpretation plausible now but might cease to do so if new evidence pointing in other directions emerges. If we were to profile the site as a *lieu de mémoire*, this approach would have to be replaced by an attitude of certainty.

Secondly, in a public domain the term would have to be filled with meaning and/or a message, which would have to be supported or presented to the public in form of activities (or rituals) like an annual celebration or regular festivities to keep the *lieu de mémoire* alive and to transmit, to retain or just maintain its meaning. But what would the message be? As a *lieu de mémoire*, Kalkriese, the site of a battle, would almost automatically be lined up with other battle sites and places of commemoration, like the Monument to the Battle of the Nations (Völkerschlachtdenkmal) in Leipzig or the battle sites of the first and second world wars in Germany, Belgium, France or Great Britain. Would

98 Zelizer 1995, 223.

99 Of course one could argue that the existence of the museum already makes Kalkriese a *lieu de mémoire*, as it stores and presents archaeological artifacts and thus preserves cultural heritage. But this argument leads to a bottomless pit, as the same meaning and importance would then have to be given to any local museum, to every church, to every historical building (or perhaps every building more than 10 years old), every material artifact (more than 10

years old?), every household in which family heirlooms are kept. Then everything is memory, and there is no need for a concept of the *lieu de mémoire*. To avoid this, we have to define or accept existing criteria concerning the scope and scale of the concept and its frame of reference – either national or just collective, no matter of which size or context. Otherwise our unpretentious ‘memory landscape’ would turn into a thick memory jungle.

that be appropriate? Annual speeches about war, peace, the friendship of the nations, the unity of Europe accompanied by solemn brass music and the laying of a wreath? One does not necessarily have to think of Ypres in Belgium, with its daily ceremony at the Menenpoort,¹⁰⁰ to gain the impression that this practiced memory has nothing in common with the memory one could perform or celebrate in Kalkriese, and that any ritualized practice at Kalkriese would lack authenticity and credibility and thus appear exaggerated and artificial.

Secondly, such a re-launch would have serious consequences for our visitors. Their perception, understanding and behavior would be guided by the specific and prescribed expectations that are almost inevitably associated with such places. Most of our programs for children, pupils, families and adults would be inappropriate, as they are aimed at awakening our visitors' enthusiasm for archaeology, history and scientific research and, often enough, incorporating a lot of fun. One of our central ideas is that our visitors should approach the park, the museum and the Varus Battle with, above all, interest, open-mindedness and curiosity. We want them to have a choice, to choose how they wish to experience the place and not to be pre-conditioned by moral expectations on their behavior or perceive the visit as a duty that every citizen somehow has to perform once in his lifetime. After all, this battle happened 2000 years ago, nobody alive now has been personally affected by it. This is the main difference between Kalkriese and the battlefields and war cemeteries of first and second world wars. At the latter, traces of the destruction are still visible, wounds and injuries have left deep scars on landscapes, towns and hearts and memories that are still vivid. In Kalkriese, nothing of that remains. As forums for the debate on war and violence, places of recent history are therefore far more authentic and credible: in them, the tragedy is still emotionally accessible and somehow in the air. At Kalkriese, all of this would have to be created, imitated and staged artificially.

Thirdly, *Museum and Park Kalkriese* are open to the public, and the majority of our visitors are not specialists, but laypeople. For them, the term *Erinnerungsort* ('place of memory') could raise associations that do not necessarily reflect the abstract academic definitions. The term *Erinnerung* (memory/reminder) is already fairly fuzzy, and it is used in everyday language in contexts which have nothing in common with the complex and abstract concepts of Pierre Nora or Maurice Halbwachs. A non-scientific audience thinks of an *Ort*, a 'place', as a location and not as a metaphor. *Erinnerung* is understood by most people literally and refers to events and personal experiences that connect them with the recent past. The German language differentiates between a reflexive and a non-reflexive use of the verb *erinnern*. *Ich erinnere mich* (I remind myself/ I remember) always refers to

100 Since 1928, a group of musicians have gathered every evening at 8:00 pm at the Menen Gate, Ypres, to play the 'Last Post' in memory of and tribute to

those who died in 1914–1918 and whose graves are unknown.

personal experiences – my parents, the first kiss, holidays in France, the death of grandmother. This kind of memory is always perceived to be authentic and can never be ‘false’ – an important aspect which can bear a large potential for conflicts. The non-reflexive use, *ich erinnere an ...* (I remind of) addresses a counterpart and is often understood as affirmation. It can refer to almost everything, the Varus Battle, Goethe or the dentist appointment next week. For most people history begins where personal memory ends (‘I remind myself/remember’). Anything that is more remote – chronologically, spatially or emotionally – is considered as history or as cultural heritage, presented by monuments, memorials and museums. Naturally the events and facts presented or preserved by such things should not be forgotten, but this is perceived as knowledge in the sense of ‘remind of’ or to think of and not as a memory connected with oneself due to emotional nearness, attachment or personal witnessing.

In this context the term *lieu de mémoire* bears some potential for misunderstanding as it is only used for a highly selected range of places or subjects. One group would probably understand the term as a quality seal for a 1st class monument, in comparison to other monuments, which, accordingly, must be of only second or third class quality. The second group would be left with the question whether they are supposed to ‘remember’ or ‘be reminded’ and whichever they decided, what conclusions could they draw? The application of these concepts to the Varus Battle in a public and non-academic context suggests that we carry a memory of the Varus Battle, deeply fossilized within us, that could be brought to life if we would just dig deep enough. But what do we do when visitors tell us that they did not find any such thing buried within themselves and accuse us of exaggeration or terminological juggling? The degree of abstraction attached to this concept is simply too great for an institution in a public space and involves too many levels for misunderstandings. The more so as the terminology as such – *lieu de mémoire* – is not made up of off-putting technical jargon but is linked to everyday language, sounds good, and does not reveal the slightest indication of the complexity of the concept hidden behind the words.

In summary: the term would either degenerate to a simple marketing label or, if taken seriously, would call into question the whole concept and character of our institution, which is based on discussion, communication, multiplicity of interpretation, and research and education as ongoing processes. ‘Memory’ in this specific context would not require any of these. ‘Memory’ provides and defines the mode of perception as well as of meaning. The site would become a symbol that needs neither further research nor further discussion – it would become a freeze frame shot or even worse a still image.

The focus at our institution, though, is on the process of research, on fascinating modern methods that might open up new ways to increase our understanding of the past. This naturally raises the question of what makes us so interested in the past and

why. The answer is simple, almost banal and naive: like us, many of our visitors simply find archaeology exciting, surprising, thrilling or even just entertaining, and are simply fascinated by the fact that new scientific methods are making it possible to analyze a mule's tooth and find out where the mule came from and how many times it had crossed the Alps before dying in Kalkriese, and that this little piece of knowledge could change our understanding of Roman logistics. Nobody is thinking about national identity or collective memories in this context.

Kalkriese is a cultural heritage site. In 2005 it was recognized by Europa Nostra as a cultural site of European importance. This honor was not awarded in recognition of the Varus Battle but in appreciation of the unconventional way we present the site, its architecture and landscaping, the research and the philosophy, the conceptual approach and the design of our exhibitions. We bear the responsibility for this site, we are researching it, we are managing it and, yes, we are selling it. But we are doing so within the specific framework we have given to this site, and that framework does not refer to memory but to research, information and education.

This paper has presented many arguments against the use of the concept of *lieu de mémoire* for *Museum and Park Kalkriese*. It has shown that the concept is too sophisticated and leaves open to great a scope for all kinds of interpretations and misunderstandings. In a place like Kalkriese, dependent on raising visitor numbers to increase its cash income, the complexity of the concept would almost inevitably degenerate to a simple marketing and promotional tool devoted only to attracting attention and generating publicity. And the general idea behind Nora's concept of *lieu de mémoire* is nonetheless, and despite all its weaknesses, still too inspiring and too valuable to make that acceptable.

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1 Varusschlacht im Osnabrücker Land Museum und Park Kalkriese, Map: © Joachim Hirschner. 2 Photo: Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum Braunschweig, Inv.-Nr. Aholbein V 3,2837. 3 Johann Jakob Sandraart, Thronende Germania, umringt von Soldaten (Frontispiz von “Großmüthiger Feldherr Arminius oder Herrmann”). Photo: Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Rom. 4 Daniel Nikolaus Chodowiecki, Ein Bardiet für die Schaubühne

Klopstocks Hermanns Schlacht: Hermann, vor einer großen Eiche, hebt den verwundeten Opfernknaben auf und küsst ihn. Photo: Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, © Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel. 5 Lippisches Landesmuseum Detmold. By Peter Janssen – (1), Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=6783514>. 6–12 Varusschlacht im Osnabrücker Land Museum und Park Kalkriese.

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