

Chapter 1

A NEW GERMANY

The Germans call their nation *Deutschland*. Located in the heart of Europe and often playing a central role in world history, it is one of the most famous countries on earth.

This is remarkable. Throughout recorded time, Germany has existed as a single, unified nation for less than a century in total. There was a unified Germany for seventy-four years from 1871 to 1945 and again during the relatively brief period from October 3, 1990 until the present. At all other times, there were at least two, and sometimes many more, German lands and German governments.

Today, a visitor to modern Germany can instantly see that German culture is far older than the unified nation's brief history. In many cities and towns, ancient churches, palaces, and castles, some dating back to the Middle Ages, stand next to gleaming steel-and-glass office buildings. At the same time, ancient forests and mountainous areas have been carefully protected so that they appear much as they must have looked a thousand years ago.

The impact of German history affects people across much of the planet today. Long before there was a single, powerful German nation, there were Germans who changed the world.

Opposite page: Old and new buildings stand alongside one another in Frankfurt, which is known for its international finance.

Chapter 3

EARLY HISTORY

In 1856 a skeleton was found buried in Germany's Neanderthal ravine, part of the enormous Neander Valley near the city of Disseldorf on the Rhine River. The skeleton appeared much like the bones of a modern human being, but seemed to be very old.

Eventually, scientists decided that this Neanderthal man, named after the German valley, was a direct relative of modern human beings. Neanderthals lived on the northern plains of Germany, and many other places in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, as much as a hundred thousand years ago. The ancient Neanderthals hunted mammals and other animals that lived around the edges of huge Ice Age glaciers that still covered much of the land.

Visitors to modern Germany can still see the ancient bones discovered in 1856. They are on display at the *Rheinisches Landesmuseum* ("Rhine-land Museum") in the city of Bonn.

ANCIENT GERMANIC TRIBES

The first groups of modern human beings known to have inhabited today's Germany were Celts. By the fifth century B.C.,

Celtic people were the most powerful force in Europe. They spread over much of the continent, plundering Rome in 390 B.C. The vast empire of the Celts spread from England in the west to Turkey in the East.

By early standards, the Celts were highly civilized people. The various tribes shared a common oral language. Pottery, jewelry, and bronze weapons were skillfully decorated. They also shared a well-developed system of religion and social customs. Nevertheless, their centralized government, if one existed at all, was not well organized.

The military successes of the Celts eventually led to their downfall. By the second century B.C., they had expanded over so much of Europe that they were vulnerable to invasion in the heart of their empire. Attacking them from the north and east, a large group of tribes called the *Teutons* gradually took over their land in present-day Germany. Over the next few centuries, the Celts were absorbed into other cultures. Even today, however, in some remote areas of the British Isles, strong echoes of the ancient Celtic language can still be heard in conversations.

Neanderthal and Celtic people may have been the first to live in Germany, but the Teutons gave the country its real character. Today, the phrases "Teutonic tribes" and "Germanic tribes" are used interchangeably to describe the same early people.

THE TEUTONIC TRIBES OF GERMANY

More than two thousand years ago, Roman soldiers fought for control of a part of Europe they called Gaul. Ancient Gaul included all of present-day France and parts of other nations as well, including the small area of Germany west of the Rhine River.



Hermann's triumph over the Romans

By the year 50 B.C. the Roman general Julius Caesar had conquered most of Gaul. For a time, the Rhine Valley fell under the control of Roman soldiers. But the Teutonic tribes living near the river soon rebelled against Roman taxes.

In the year A.D. 9, the Teutonic soldier Hermann (called Arminius in Latin) defeated a huge Roman army of about twenty thousand soldiers in the dense Teutoburg Forest. The Battle of Teutoburg Forest was one of the most important events in ancient European history. Partly because of it, the major language groups of Europe were divided roughly at the Rhine River. To the west of it, the people conquered by the Romans developed Roman customs and Romance languages. To the east of the Rhine, people kept their Teutonic languages and customs. The effects of that two-thousand-year-old battle can clearly be felt by people traveling across Europe today.

Many Germans regard Hermann as their first national hero. Two of his favorite sayings are remembered to this day: "In unity there is strength!" and "Rather death than slavery!"

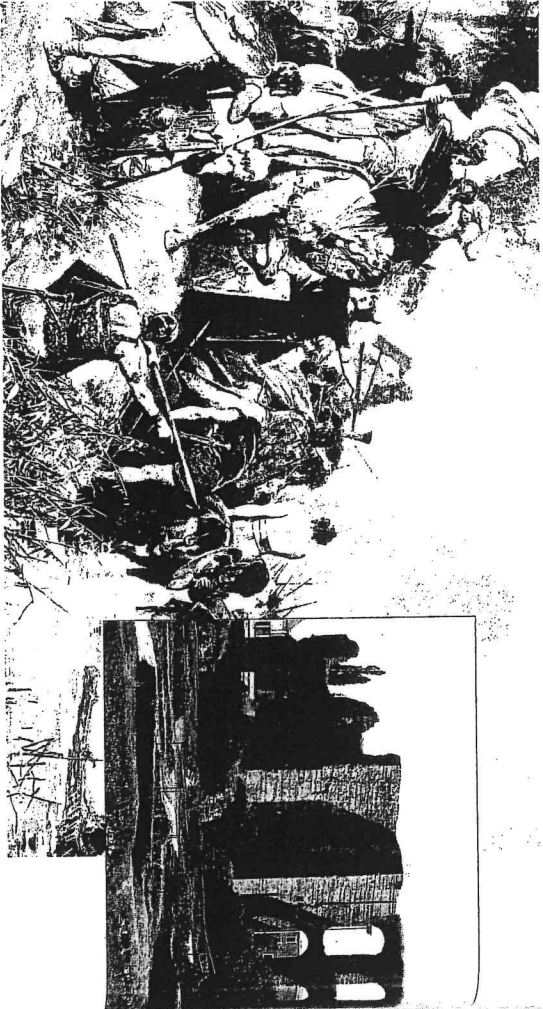
In the year A.D. 98, the Roman historian Tacitus published a book called *On the Origin, Location, Manners, and Inhabitants of Germany*, better known as *The Germania*. In it, he wrote: "I agree with those who think that the tribes of Germany are free from all trace of intermarriage with foreign nations, and that they appear as a distinct, unmixed race, like none but themselves. Hence it is, that the same physical features are to be observed throughout so vast a population. All have fierce blue eyes, reddish hair, and huge bodies fit only for sudden exertion"

"Iron is not plentiful among them," Tacitus continued, "as may be inferred from the nature of their weapons. Only a few make use of swords or long lances. Ordinarily they carry a spear"

"It is a well-known fact that the people of Germany have no cities, and that they do not even allow buildings to be erected close together. They live scattered about, wherever a spring, or a meadow, or a wood has attracted them."

THE CHANGING FACE OF EUROPE

During the first few centuries A.D., the Teutonic tribes of Germany began to change. A number of the smaller, older tribes joined together, sometimes with wandering tribes from other parts of Europe, and became larger and more powerful. Among the stronger new tribes were the Alemanni, Bavarians, Burgundians, Franks, Goths, Saxons, Thuringians, and Vandals. Some of these tribes crossed the Rhine River to battle Roman soldiers still in control to the west. Other European and Asian



Clovis defeats the Goths; Roman aqueduct and bath ruins in Trier (right inset)

tribes also battled Roman soldiers. Throughout Europe, Roman soldiers and politicians became less powerful.

Of the many Teutonic tribes that battled for control of territory in central Europe, the eventual clear winners were the Franks. Clovis I, an early Frankish leader, ruled all of France and Holland and much of Germany from A.D. 481 to 511. He lived, however, not in Germany but in Paris, France. For nearly two centuries, the heirs of Clovis continued to rule much of Germany, as well as other parts of Europe.

The Frankish tribe was the most powerful in Germany, but there were many other tribes active there as well. Not all of the people living in Germany were even Teutonic. Early Frankish laws, probably written during the reign of Clovis I, reflected the area's diversity. Under those laws, for example, the fine for killing a free Frank was twice as high as the fine for killing a Roman. (On



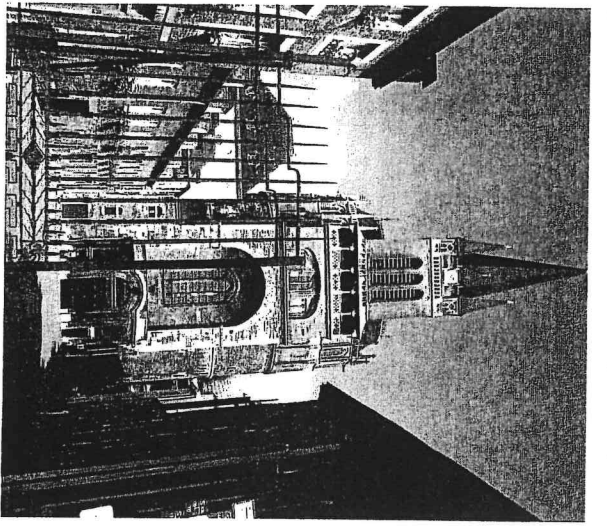
Emperor Charlemagne ruled the Christian Western world for over thirty years.

the other hand, if a murderer killed a Frank and then placed the body in a well, or under water, or tried to hide it by covering it with branches, the fine was four times higher. Fines were paid not to the king's government, but to the victim's relatives!)

CHARLEMAGNE

During the seventh and eighth centuries, control of France and Germany was taken away from the heirs of Clovis I by a new royal family. By far the most powerful of the new leaders was named Charlemagne (Karl der Grosse in German). Raised in the Christian faith since his birth in 742, Charlemagne eventually became the ruler of most of Europe, including Germany.

Between the years 771 and 814, Charlemagne was the sole ruler of the Franks. Through diplomacy and warfare with neighboring people, he extended his control to most of the land bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and the North, Baltic, Black, and



Entrance to Aachen Cathedral

Mediterranean seas. A devout Christian, Charlemagne spent much of his energy battling the Saxons, a powerful tribe that refused to accept the Christian religion. During his reign, most of the old Teutonic tribes, including the Saxons, came under his Christian rule.

In the later years of his life, Charlemagne set up his court in the German city soon called Aix-la-Chapelle. Today named Aachen, it is the same town in which his father, Pippin, had lived. Modern visitors to Aachen can enter the *Dom*, a cathedral that Charlemagne started and which was completed a thousand years later. Inside the old church is the worn but still impressive marble throne Charlemagne used twelve hundred years ago.

In the year 800, Charlemagne led an army to Rome, where Pope Leo III had been wounded and driven from office the previous year. The Frankish king helped Leo return to power. On Christmas Day in the year 800, Charlemagne was in St. Peter's

church in Rome. While he was praying at the altar, Pope Leo unexpectedly approached and proclaimed him "Emperor of the Romans." The new title revived the old idea of a Roman emperor in control of most of Western Europe.

According to a ninth-century historian, Charlemagne graciously accepted his new title but was secretly annoyed by it. A great many local rulers, especially in Italy, resented Charlemagne's new fame. The new emperor had to spend much of his time being polite to others who felt his title was improper. The struggle by Germanic kings to become "Emperor of the Romans," and soon "Holy Roman Emperor," played an important role in European history for centuries following his death.

Charlemagne died in 814 and was buried in the cathedral at Aachen. His remains are still there today. Many of the cultural and social roots of modern Germany, as well as its neighbors, can be traced to this powerful ruler. It was during his time, for example, that the word *deutsch* seems to have first appeared to describe a German language. At the time, however, Germans hardly spoke with one voice. The Teutonic tribes united by Charlemagne spoke many different dialects. Many educated Europeans, including some Frankish leaders, considered the German languages barbaric. Latin, and even a corrupted Latin that became the French language, were often more acceptable.

CONFLICT AND CONFUSION

The heirs of Charlemagne were not able to hold his empire together for long. In 843, three of his grandsons met and signed the Treaty of Verdun. That agreement divided what was left of Charlemagne's empire into three sections. One grandson, Charles

the Bald, took control of the western part of the empire, roughly the area that is now France. Another grandson, Louis, took the eastern part of Charlemagne's territory, which includes much of modern-day Germany. The area between the two lands was controlled by the third grandson, Lothair.

Lothair's territory, sometimes called the middle kingdom, was short-lived. Treaties signed in 870 and 880 broke it up. A portion of it went to the eastern (Germanic) empire. From this time onward, Germany's western boundary was more or less fixed around the Rhine River. The eastern boundary, however, shifted dramatically over the centuries. That eastern boundary, in fact, was the subject of heated debate between Germans and Poles as recently as the year 1990!

More than a thousand years earlier, in 911, the last of Charlemagne's heirs died. At that time, landowning noblemen and religious leaders elected a Frankish duke, Conrad I, as the new king. Many historians regard Conrad as Germany's first true king. In those days, however, he was called "King of the Franks." In the eleventh century, the kingdom was named the Roman Empire; in the thirteenth century, the Holy Roman Empire, and in the fifteenth century, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.

Conrad I may have been the first king of Germany, but he hardly ruled over a true nation. Medieval Germany had no capital. Its elected king moved about regularly. He could collect taxes only from people living on land that he himself owned. Some noblemen barely recognized the king's authority.

Two kings who followed Conrad were able to command more respect from their fellow Germans. Henry I of Saxony ruled from 919 to 936; his son, Otto I (also called Otto the Great) from 936 to 973. These kings, especially Otto, had the military skill and the

ability to develop allies among German noblemen to make themselves very powerful. During his reign, Otto was involved in a number of bloody battles to preserve and increase his power.

In 962, Otto was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by twenty-four-year-old Pope John XII. The title undoubtedly pleased Otto, but it was hardly helpful in establishing Germany as a nation. Otto, and other Holy Roman Emperors who followed him, spent much of their time trying to control northern Italy. For centuries, German kings fretted over their "Italian policies."

At the same time, Otto followed a policy that gave certain German towns and villages, all headed by noblemen or church leaders, many of the powers of modern nations. In 965, for example, Otto issued a charter to the archbishop of Hamburg. The charter gave the archbishop the right to establish and control a market in a place called Bremen. (Today, the city of Bremen has more than a half million inhabitants.) The archbishop could administer most of the laws in his marketplace, collect taxes, and even mint money. While kings and queens in other developing European nations tried to increase their control over their subjects, German kings gave much of it away.

Over the next several hundred years, German kings fought with their own families, their neighbors, popes, residents of Italian city-states, and many others. But try as they might, the Holy Roman emperors, as the German kings were called, could not control local states and cities arising throughout Germany.

Germany was not ready to become a nation. But the growing strength of the German people would soon be felt throughout Europe.

Ring seal of Otto I; at that time he spelled his name Oddo.



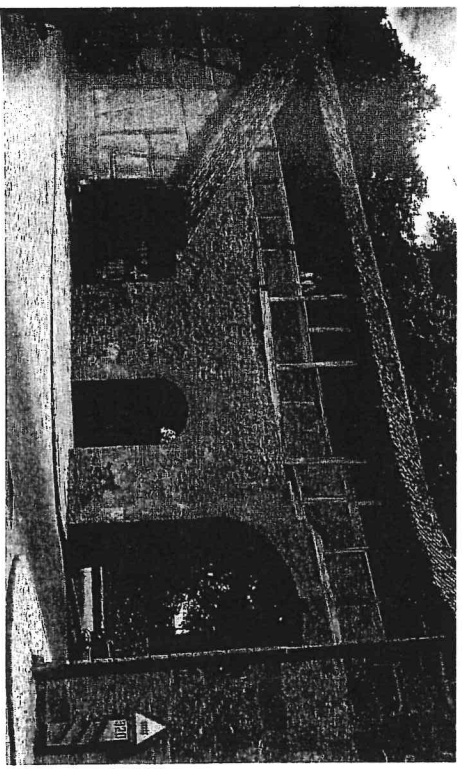
Chapter 4

THE RISE OF GERMAN CULTURE

For a period of nearly a thousand years, from 962 to 1806, Germany was ruled by a long list of "Roman emperors" and "Holy Roman emperors." But despite the lofty titles, German emperors were hardly even true kings in their own land. They were elected by a few noblemen and church officials. In order to win votes, German kings had to sign agreements handing over much of their power to those about to elect them.

Of Germany's early rulers, one of the better known was Frederick I, also known as Frederick Barbarossa, who came to power in 1152. Frederick was the first emperor in a line of German kings, called the Hohenstaufen Dynasty, that lasted a century.

In 1273, following a period of civil war, Rudolf I was crowned emperor. Rudolf was a member of a large and wealthy family called the Hapsburgs. For the next five centuries, all but a few of Germany's emperors were members of the Hapsburg family. At various times, Hapsburgs also ruled in Austria, Bohemia, Hungary, Spain, and elsewhere. But in Germany, at least in the



The walled town of Nordlingen is an example of the past when cities were built with thick stone walls for protection.

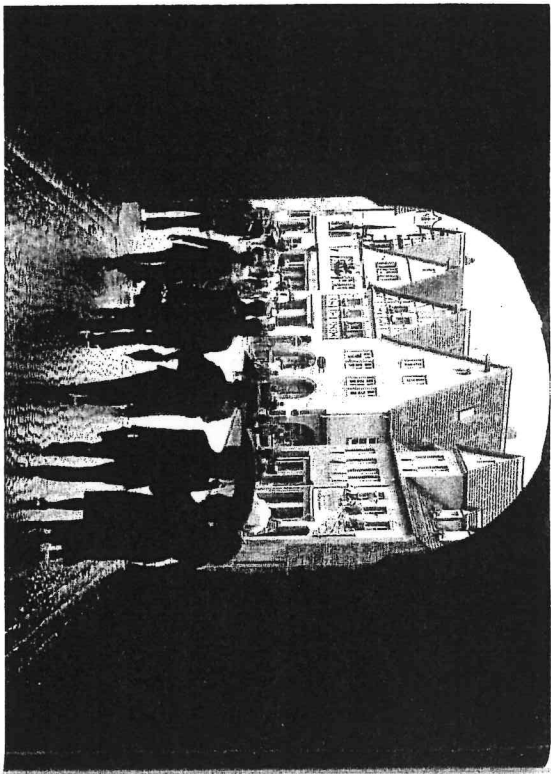
German states outside of present-day Austria, their power was limited. In much of Germany, real political strength was held by local princes and by officials of the Roman Catholic church. Eventually, the Hapsburgs controlled only Austria.

The kings of Germany were nearly powerless to unite the nation, but a sense of nationality began to arise anyway. The German language was becoming increasingly well developed. During the Middle Ages, two epic German poems were written that eventually achieved world-wide fame. *Parzival*, by Wolfram von Eschenbach, told the story of a man who searched for the Holy Grail of Jesus and found wisdom along the way. Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan und Isolde* became one of the world's most lasting love stories.

TWO GERMAN LEAGUES

During the civil wars of the mid-1200s, travel between German towns was dangerous. People who ventured out from behind walled cities and castles were endangered not only by armies at war, but by highway robbers as well. Most store owners, traders,

Walking through the
gate of another fortified
medieval town—
Rothenberg, o.d. Tauber



and craftsmen huddled inside the thick stone walls that protected their communities. Without a king able to enforce the laws, German townspeople eventually took matters into their own hands.

In 1254, representatives of the clergy, lawyers, judges, and other leading citizens of a number of cities along the Rhine River signed a document creating the Rhine League. The league declared a general peace in the valley for a period of ten years. It also called for each member city and nobleman to appoint "four reliable men and give them full authority to settle all differences of opinion in a friendly way."

Another German league, actually founded thirteen years earlier, started slowly but soon influenced much of Europe. In 1241, representatives from a number of north German towns, including Bremen, Hamburg, Cologne, and Lübeck, created the Hanseatic League. It was established to protect residents of member towns from pirates at sea and robbers on land.

As the years passed, the Hanseatic League became a virtual nation. It set up legislatures, courts, a treasury, and established banks and offices as far away as London.

By the mid-1400s, the Hanseatic League was in decline. The number of herring in the Baltic Sea decreased. Herring was a major source of income for the north German towns. More important, the French monopolized the salt trade. Without salt, herring spoiled quickly. Nevertheless, the old Hanseatic League had tremendous importance in helping a number of German cities grow. Some of the workers in cities such as Bremen and Cologne became quite wealthy, as rich as some of the lords and ladies of the nobility. The league brought a great sense of pride to many northern German towns. Because they were not owned by a local prince, some were called "free cities." "To this day, the German city-states of Bremen and Hamburg refer to themselves as "Hanseatic cities."

THE GUTTENBERG BIBLE

Until the mid-1450s, almost all books were copied by hand. They were, therefore, rare and expensive. Chinese printers experimented with a new type of mechanical printing, but they soon abandoned it, mostly because of the complexity of their written language. A German goldsmith and printer named Johannes Gutenberg is believed to be the man who made it possible to print books relatively inexpensively for the first time.

Working in a shop in Mainz, Gutenberg cast metal squares, each with a letter of the Latin alphabet raised from the otherwise flat surface of the metal piece. Several thousand of the metal pieces were then put in a special tray. Because they were made so