

THE EVOLUTION OF PREHISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY UNDER THE THIRD REICH:
AS SEEN IN THE EXPERIENCES AND WORK OF GERMAN ARCHAEOLOGISTS,
NAZIS, AND THE AHNENERBE INSTITUTE

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The discipline of prehistoric archaeology changed dramatically under the Third Reich. The Nazis manipulated data provided by archaeologists, anthropologists, ethnologists, linguists, and many more areas of study in order to promote the nationalistic ideology of the National Socialist Party. With this project, I not only wanted to examine in what ways this manipulation was done, but also the implications this exploitation had on the development of prehistoric archaeology itself. In order to accomplish this, I have focused my attentions on the scholars who worked under the conditions of the NS Party. Through these professionals, I saw a wide range of participation and acknowledgement of the conditions of their involvement. The Ahnenerbe Institute was also examined due to its heavy contribution in acquiring and distributing the widely falsified data to the public. This project will contribute in understanding further the affects this period in academic history, as well as world history, had on the prehistoric archaeology.

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INTRODUCTION

Between the years 1933-1945, the government in Germany manipulated and used prehistoric archaeology in its attempts to promote their own political ideals. In addition to Heinrich Himmler being appointed the role of *Reichsführer-SS* (Chief of the German police, including the Gestapo), he was also very interested in the origins of the German people; or in his eyes, the Aryan race. Almost immediately, Himmler began to establish research institutions whose goals were to support and advance the nationalistic ideology of Aryan superiority. The *Forschungs- und Lehrgemeinschaft das Ahnenerbe*, or the Ancestral Heritage Research and Teaching Society, was where the majority of his efforts in determining the origins of the Aryan race were concentrated. The Ahnenerbe (pronounced *AH-nen-AIR-buh*) used an interdisciplinary approach in tackling the questions of Aryan origins.

Before the Nazi regime, prehistoric archaeology was not a popular area of study to go into. The buzz was all about Classical Archaeology or Egyptology. Unfortunately, Prehistoric Archaeology, specifically in and around Germany, remained under funded by the government and under the public's radar. This paper will examine the change that took place in the early 1900s through the 1940s when prehistoric archaeology was pushed into the spotlight. The questions that will be addressed are: How did the shift to prehistoric archaeology influence the scholars of the time and how did the politics of the day affect archaeological interpretation?

In order to accomplish this task, I will first introduce the Aryan myth, including its unlikely origins and evolution into the belief system held by the Nazis. Then, I will delve into the mind of Gustaf Kossinna and his version of a culture-historical approach to the field of archaeological research. Following Kossinna and Alfred Rosenberg, we will need a better

understanding of Heinrich Himmler, including his own background and philosophy. Next, I will introduce The Players; the scholars, who either participated willingly, silently, or not at all in the practices of Nazi Archaeology. After examining the Amt Rosenberg and the Ahnenerbe Institute, this paper will conclude with a discussion on the consequences of ethnocentric theory as it relates to the validation for mass murder, war, and the conquering of other peoples.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The background portion of this paper will give a refresher course of events and terms that will be referenced later on. This chapter reviews the origin of the term *Aryan* as well as the myth of the Aryan race. Also included are the backgrounds of three major contributors to Nazi Archaeology and ideology: Gustaf Kossinna, Alfred Rosenberg, and Heinrich Himmler.

Origins of *Aryan*

The notion of *Aryanism* began not as a racial construct, but a linguistic one. Sir William Jones, an Orientalist who mastered nearly two-dozen languages, took up studying Sanskrit. During this time, he noted several similarities between Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin. In 1786, Jones presented his linguistic findings in a paper to the Asiatic Society:

The Sanskrit language, whatever may be its antiquity, is of wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either; yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of the verbs and in the forms of the grammar, than could have been produced by accident; so strong that no philologer could examine all the three without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists [Pringle, 2006].

Throughout Jones' work in later years, he offered up a new term to European scholars; the Sanskrit word *Arya*, meaning noble, to describe people who spoke a particular group of Indian languages. The term was originally used in India to describe people who worship Hindu gods. (Pringle, 2006)

Scholars quickly jumped to continue Jones' research and began comparing words and grammar from across Europe and Asia. They soon discovered that over forty major languages corresponded with Sanskrit in individual words and/or grammar properties. This group of languages was called *Indo-European* by the British, *Indo-German* by the German, and most other scholars used Jones' term: *Aryan*. (Pringle, 2006)

Theodor Benfey was the man who added the remaining fuel to the Aryan fire. Benfey wanted to find the homeland of the Aryans by tracing it back linguistically. His study suggested that Aryans emerged from northern Europe and spread from there all the way out to the Himalayas. Although his conclusions were later contradicted by similar studies, German nationalists jumped on the theory and ran with it. (Pringle, 2006)

There is only one source that is continually referenced as the basis of the Aryan physical description. That source is a Roman historian who was born in A.D. 55 and died in A.D. 120. The historian was Tacitus and the source was an excerpt from one of his first writings, *Germania*. In *Germania*, he describes the German people as such:

For myself I accept the view that the peoples of Germany have never been tainted by intermarriage with other peoples, and stand out as a nation peculiar, pure and unique of its kind. Hence the physical type, if one may generalize at all about so vast a population, is everywhere the same – wild, blue eyes, reddish hair and huge frames that excel only in violent effort. (Mattingly, 1965)

The Nazis seem to have taken some liberties with this excerpt by focusing primarily on the physical description: blue eyes, reddish (and I have also seen this selection translated as reddish-blond or simply blond) hair, and large frames (tall). It is interesting to note Tacitus' mention of the lack of intermarriage among the Germans and other peoples. Although this excerpt was not the cause of the intermarriage argument, it certainly did not hurt the campaign against it.

The origin of Aryanism has a surprising history; full of misinterpretation and unreliable data. However, it is important to know where the concept came from to understand how it evolved into what it was. Kossinna was one of several scholars who were attempting to locate the origin of the Indo-Europeans. Using his settlement theory, Kossinna was hoping that by locating the original Indo-Europeans he would be locating the origin of the German people.

Gustaf Kossinna (1858-1931)

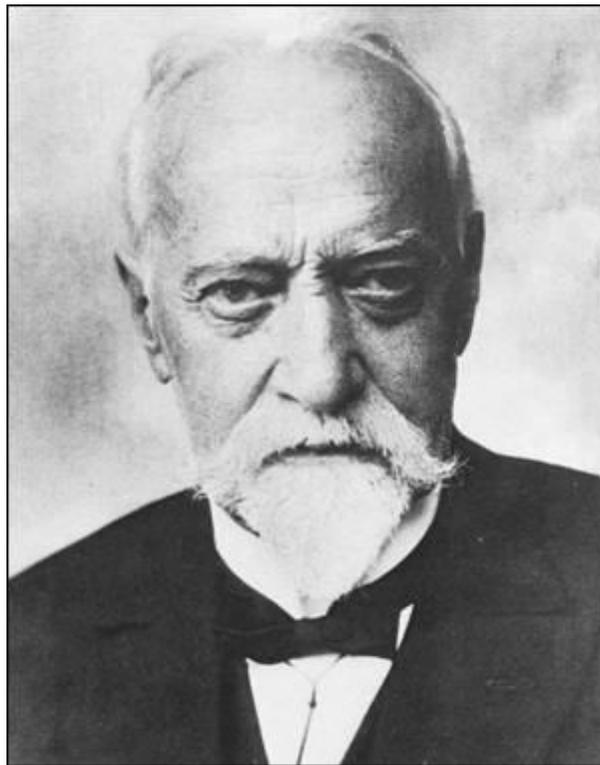


Figure 1. Gustaf Kossinna (www.ucm.es)

Although Gustaf Kossinna (Figure 1) provided the framework for the Nazi's racist ideology, since 1945 and until recently, Germans have had little to say about Kossinna himself. His work has been widely discussed; however, it was not usually attached to his name. It has taken a long time for German scholars to come to terms with what happened in the 1930s and 1940s in archaeology. Because Kossinna's theories played such a big role in the Nazi ideology, it has been a struggle to cope with that fact. His work and social beliefs carried a significant impact on

archaeological thought; so this section will go over Kossinna's past and his most influential theories, so the circumstances can be better understood.

Gustaf Kossinna grew up in conservative, middle-class surroundings, which likely led to his strong nationalistic tendencies. He went to university and studied German antiquity and philology. Kossinna took a job as a librarian after university; due to lack of prospects, however continued to study prehistory whenever he had the chance. Oscar Montelius and Otto Tischler in particular influenced him. (Veit, 2002)

Kossinna's theory of settlement archaeology is what he is particularly known for. Settlement archaeology focuses on tracing where ethnic groups have settled over time. He believed culture continuity indicated ethnic continuity (Trigger, 2007). The first thing that is done in settlement archaeology is to attempt to map out the distribution of artifacts that have characteristics that can be associated with ethnic or tribal groups whose locations can be identified to the early historic period. This, in turn, would make it possible to use the material culture associated with those groups to establish, through archaeology, where they had lived in earlier periods. (Trigger 2007)

Settlement archaeology is a fascinating concept: to be able to associate known ethnic groups to prehistoric sites. Kossinna, however, would have had to make several assumptions about who was German and who was not. When looking into the past, at some point it would be impossible to distinguish between tribal groups; further still, it would become increasingly difficult to differentiate between the Germans, Celts, Slavs, and other Indo-European groups; and eventually all one would have to work with is material that is Indo-European or non-Indo-European. (Trigger 2007)

Much of Gustaf Kossinna's work in settlement archaeology has been overshadowed by his racist viewpoint. His more controversial views were what drew him to the National Socialists. Before Kossinna died in 1931, he was being drawn to the Nazi Party. Remember, he held a very nationalistic perspective. He deemed archaeology as the most national of sciences and the study of the ancient Germans as the most noble of subjects for archaeological research (Trigger, 2007). What really attracted the Nazis to Kossinna's research was his claim that archaeology could be used in establishing historical rights to territory. He argued that wherever alleged German artifacts were found, that area could be declared ancient German territory; territory which the people of modern Germany were entitled to (Trigger, 2007). This was one of the main theories the Nazis used to justify taking over territories in Europe. Not only that, but this philosophy was also being used to justify conquering parts of Asia, although the War never made it that far (Hale, 2003).

Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946)

Rosenberg was a pretty active member of the *Nationalsozialistisch Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (National Socialist Workers Party - NSDAP). In fact, he joined the party right around the same time as Adolf Hitler in 1919. After the failed attempt by Hitler to overthrow the government in 1923, Hitler appointed Rosenberg as his temporary replacement at the head of the NSDAP (s-t.com, 2005). Reportedly, years later Hitler remarked that placing Rosenberg at that position was a strategic move. Hitler did not want a likable, strong candidate to take his place temporarily because he feared that his replacement would not be willing to step down. Rosenberg's weak personality and lack of self-motivation made him the perfect temporary replacement in Hitler's eyes. (s-t.com, 2005)

In 1930, Rosenberg's racial and religious views came out in his book *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (*The Myth of the Twentieth Century*). In his book, he describes a racial hierarchy with Jews and Blacks at the very bottom; and at the top was the white, Aryan race. The Master Race included Germans, Scandinavians, Balts, and people of the British Isles. Of course, the Germans were considered the "Masters" of the Master Race (s-t.com, 2005). Rosenberg had a little more difficulty relaying his religious theories to the people. He rejected what he called *negative* Christianity and encouraged a more *positive* view using Chamberlain's fantasy that Jesus was a member of a Nordic conclave living in Galilee and struggling against Judaism (s-t.com, 2005). Obviously, this new form of "Christianity" was not well-received by the people. For this reason, Hitler presented himself as a Christian in public, in his book, *Mein Kampf*, and rejected this new religious theory. However, the debate continues whether Hitler was a Christian or not. Martin Bormann, in 1942, wrote that National Socialism and Christianity were two concepts that were incompatible. Hitler did not even blink at these words, which leads me to believe that he held similar ideas.

In 1934, Rosenberg was appointed the "Führer's deputy for the supervision of all intellectual and ideological training and education of the NSDAP" (Haßmann, 2002). He became the head of the Amt Rosenberg, an organization, named after him, that was established for that very purpose. Rosenberg launched six (later seven) sections in the Amt Rosenberg. Archaeology was represented by the *Reichsfachgruppe für Vorgeschichte* (Specialist Group for Prehistory) (Haßmann, 2002). I will go into greater detail on the activities of the Amt Rosenberg in a later section of this paper.

Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945)

When it comes to naming the most influential Nazi in regards to ideological manipulation and control, Heinrich Himmler is who comes to mind. Since his youth, Himmler has been fascinated with Germany's history, more specifically Germany's prehistory. During World War I, Himmler was desperate to get to the front; however at the time he was still a young teenager (Pringle, 2006). When the Imperial German Army surrendered in 1918, Himmler was shocked and appalled; even more so, when he heard about the Treaty of Versailles and its stipulations. Because of the treaty and the Allies' demand for reparations, the Weimar Republic pushed out more and more paper money without the financial backing to sustain it. This caused, what economists call, hyperinflation. Between 1922 and 1923, prices jumped 10,000 percent in Germany; and in another five months, they soared to over 10,000,000 percent (Pringle, 2006). The Treaty of Versailles had become the catalyst for recruitment into the National Socialist German Worker's Party. The people of Germany were in a state of desperation, anger, and frustration; they needed someone to blame and someone to follow. Hitler emerged as a leader in the NSDAP early on and "promised to unite all Germans – no matter where they resided, whether in Austria, Czechoslovakia, or Poland – in a Greater Germany and tear up the hated Treaty of Versailles"(Pringle, 2006). Anti-Semitism was a common idea in and around Germany at that time, so the Jews emerged as an easy group to put the blame on for Germany's problems.

Himmler joined the Nazi party in 1923, shortly before Hitler's attempted coup. The failure of that coup resulted in Hitler's imprisonment, as stated earlier. During that time in prison, he wrote *Mein Kampf* and in 1925, Himmler picked up his own copy of the autobiography. One section struck his particular interest, as it pertained to Germany's great

ancestors. Hitler described an ancient, noble people called the Aryans; who held the key to the modern German's past. This excerpt comes from Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*:

All human culture, all the results of art, science, and technology that we see before us today, are almost exclusively the creative product of the Aryan. This very fact admits of the not unfounded inference that he alone was the founder of all humanity, therefore representing the prototype of all that we understand by the word 'man'. He is the Prometheus of mankind from whose bright forehead the divine spark of genius has sprung at all times, forever kindling anew that fire of knowledge which illumined the night of silent mysteries and thus caused man to climb the path to mastery over the other beings of this earth. Exclude him—perhaps after a few thousand years darkness will again descend on the earth, human culture will pass, and the world turn to desert. (Pringle, 2006)

After a short stint as a poultry farmer, Himmler was appointed as Head of Hitler's personal bodyguard, the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), in 1929 (Wistrich, 1997). Himmler wasted no time in implementing his own version of discipline within the SS. The men sang SS songs, listened to political speeches, and reported on Jews, Freemasons, and leaders of rival political movements (Pringle, 2006).

As the *Reichsführer-SS*, Himmler made a plan to transform the SS into a showcase of racial perfection. He intended to breed pure Aryans and use ancient lore from Germany's ancestors to educate them (Pringle, 2006). Himmler needed a way to screen individuals to be sure of their racial status, as he only wanted young males with Nordic blood. He wanted this process to appear as scientific as possible, so in 1931, Himmler established the *Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS*, the Race and Settlement Office of the SS (RuSHA). Himmler described the RuSHA advisors as being, "like a nursery gardener trying to reproduce a good old strain which has been adulterated and debased; we started from the principles of plant selection and then proceeded quite unashamedly to weed out the men whom we did not think we could use for the buildup of the SS" (Pringle, 2006).

Now that Himmler had his racial elite in the form of the SS, he required a way to educate them in the ways of the ancient Germans. In order for this to succeed, the *education offensive* would need a stockpile of ideological tools, including: Symbologists, Historians and experts in ancient lore, Musicologists, Botanists, and Archaeologists (Pringle, 2006). Himmler needed an entire institute of researchers to reconstruct the Nordic/Aryan past. This institute was called the *Deutsches Ahnenerbe Studiengesellschaft für Geistesurgeschichte* or German Ancestral Heritage, the Society for the Study of the History of Primeval Ideas. The institute was later renamed to the *Forschungs- und Lehrgemeinschaft das Ahnenerbe*, or the Ancestral Heritage Research and Teaching Society. The Ahnenerbe, as the institute came to be known as, will be touched on in greater detail in an upcoming chapter. For now, this paper will turn its focus on the individuals who found themselves involved in the Nazi machine.

TYPOLGY OF SCHOLARS

This chapter lays out the method I used to describe and divide scholars under the National Socialist system. Most of the sources used were library resources: books, journals, and articles. However, this methodology comes from one source in particular: Bettina Arnold.

In an article written by Arnold (1990), entitled *The Past as Propaganda: Totalitarian Archaeology in Nazi Germany*, she sets up a typology for the classification of various German prehistoric archaeologists. The three categories that make up the *Typology of Scholars* are: the Party-Liners, the Mitläufer (Passive Majority), and the Opposition.

The Party-Liners

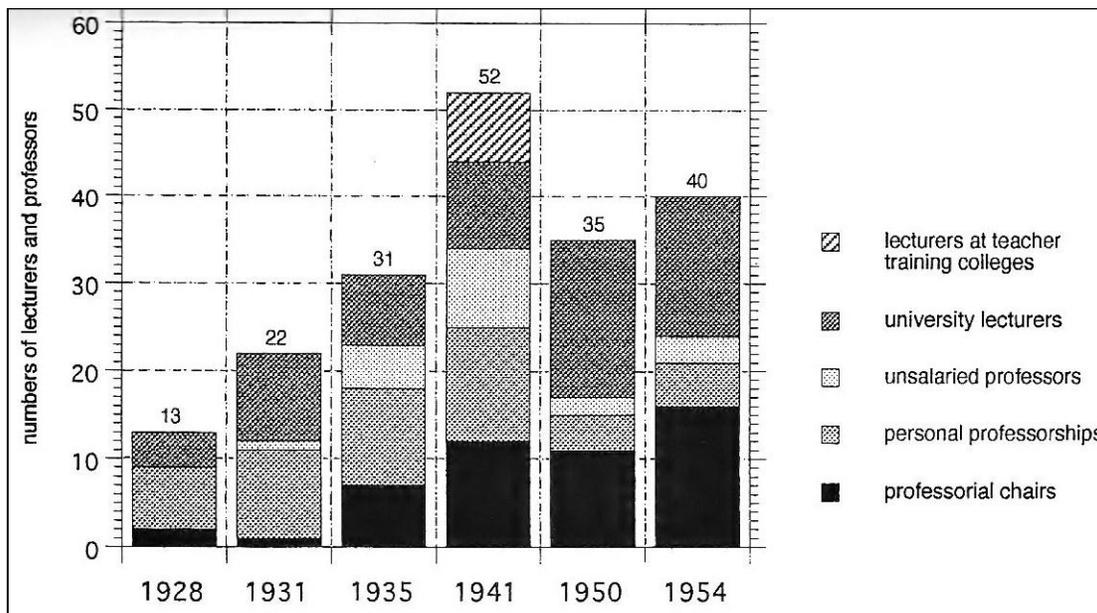
The Party-Liners consisted of scholars who used the power of the National Socialist (NS) party in order to gain recognition in the academic arena or those who continued to forward their career by conducting research that staying in line with the aims of the regime. Hans Reinerth, whom I will discuss in greater detail later, was one such researcher who jumped on the NS-bandwagon in order to further his career. Bettina Arnold describes the roles of the Party-Liners as such: “These individuals consciously participated in what was at best a distortion of scholarship and at worst a contribution to the legitimation of a genocidal authoritarian regime” (Arnold, 1990).

Party-Liners also included a fanatic branch who’s members where known as *Germanomanen*, or Germanomaniacs. Herman Wirth, co-founder of the Ahnenerbe, was considered to be a Germanomaniac due, in part, to his attempts to prove that Northern Europe was the cradle of Western civilization.

Mitläufer (Passive Majority)

Mitläufer or the passive majority (as translated by Bettina Arnold, 1990) comprised of thousands who complied, silently, to teach what they were told to teach in schools and universities across Germany. It is not, however, difficult to understand where the *Mitläufer* were coming from. A public interest in prehistory was developing and most scholars of the time made the decision to move up right along with it. As shown in Table 1, the growth in the discipline can be seen in the number of chairs and professional positions that emerged in the field Prehistory during the Nazi regime.

Table 1. Growth in the positions available in the field of Prehistory between 1928 and 1954 (Haßmann, 2002)



The Opposition

The Opposition includes not only the critical opposition, but also the scholars who were victimized under the regime of National Socialism. Members of this group, whether they were speaking out critically of the policies and tactics of the establishment or simply innocent bystanders prejudiced due to race or political view, had to be extra cautious around the Nazi

organization. Gerhard Bersu was forced into early retirement from the director's position at the Römisch Germanische Kommission in 1935. Several scholars, Hans Kühn, Peter Goessler, Paul Jacobsthal, and Franz Weidenreich among others, were forced to leave due to being Jewish or simply being unable to reconcile with the ideals of the Nazi dictatorship.

The most notable faction of scholars, the critical opposition, was also one of the smallest. Two of these men, K.H. Jacob-Friesen and Ernst Wahle, managed to maintain their positions while continuing to criticize the methods and theories of the fringe-prehistorians. Although I have only briefly touched on the experiences of these scholars, I will examine several their careers and actions in more detail in the subsequent chapter.

THE PLAYERS

This chapter will elaborate further on the careers and principles of the scholars listed above in the typology. These men held a range of influences over the manipulative data that emerged during the Second World War; ranging from being highly involved, to being pushed out of the arena early on.

The National Socialists understood the political advantages of a nationalistic and scientific discipline like prehistory. Hans Reinerth understood the political, social, and professional advantages of being on the right side of the Nazis. In 1933, he stood out from the other prehistorian when he said, "If we wish to return to being a great, united people, we must make contact with that time when the core of the Nordic race was still pure and uncorrupted, along with a glorious culture that influenced all of Europe. That is the period of Germanic antiquity, the German prehistory" (Haßmann, 2002). That statement grabbed the attention of Alfred Rosenberg, and Reinerth soon became his leading prehistorian in the Amt Rosenberg.

The Amt Rosenberg was an organization dedicated to the pursuit of the ancient history of the German people. In doing so, Rosenberg intended to prove the superiority of the ancient Nordic race. Hans Reinerth was made the head of the Specialist Group for Prehistory, the archaeology department of the Amt Rosenberg (Haßmann, 2002). With that one appointment, Reinerth became the most powerful archaeologist in Nazi Germany. He did not waste any time making his influence known. In 1933, he presented his proposal on the political program for National Socialist influence on German pre- and protohistory. In it, Reinerth advised that there be total control over heritage management (culture resource management), museums, and universities. Rosenberg and Reinerth pushed for a *Reichsinstitut* for German Prehistory that would oversee all of these areas (Haßmann, 2002). Although, at first it did not look like Reinerth and Rosenberg would be at all successful, a trend emerged in 1933 that suggested otherwise. The *Gesellschaft für deutsche Vorgeschichte* (Society for German Prehistory) became the *Reichsbund für deutsche Vorgeschichte* (Reich Association for German Prehistory). Under this new organization, an attempt was made to bring in all of the individual societies for prehistory and antiquity. The East German Society and the Central German Society both resigned to Reinerth's control. The South German Society and the North-West German Society, however, banded together under the protection of several regional politicians. Nevertheless, when Reinerth got the cooperation of the Professional Union of German Prehistorians, he had, essentially, total control over the content of teaching, researching, and staffing. He began to attack his opposition severely and dig into their racial background to find excuses to remove them from their posts (Haßmann, 2002).

Reinerth set his sights on closing the *Römisch-Germanische Kommission* (RGK), an organization involved in Classical Archaeology and History, in Frankfurt and calling for the

removal of “the Jewish director Bersu” (Haßmann, 2002). Gerard Bersu was well-known and well-respected in the discipline. He had also set himself apart by being highly critical of Kossinna’s school of thought and its intellectual background. This criticism is likely what put him at the top of Reinerth’s list. While Bersu was safe at first from Reinerth’s attempts to get rid of him; by 1935 his Jewish heritage and pressure from the Reichsbund forced him to give up his directorship. Bersu was, however, lucky enough to get a position at the *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut* (DAI) and keep it until 1937, when he was forced to retire under the new “Law on the Reestablishment of the Professional Civil Service” (Haßmann, 2002).

Reinerth never did gain control of the RGK, one of the most influential institutes for German archaeology; likely due to the influence of the president of the DAI who had more and better connections than Reinerth. Reinerth continued to lead fierce campaigns against several well-established archaeologists including Peter Goessler, Herbert Kühn, and Gero von Merhart. Eventually, his harsh leadership led more and more members of the Reichsbund away from him. The Amt Rosenberg had gotten to the point where they could not even claim to be doing legitimate research anymore; which forced many prehistorians to turn to the Ahnenerbe for support. (Haßmann, 2002)

K.H. Jacob-Friesen and Ernst Wahle had a very different experience in the Third Reich. These two men were a part of the critical faction, as described in Arnold’s typology. Jacob-Friesen was very open with his criticism about the distortion of data towards a growing nationalistic perspective. In an article he wrote in 1934, Jacob-Friesen warned against the excesses of nationalistic and racist manipulation of archaeological data. He saw the complete distortion of data by the party doctrine to be an attack on German scholarship and on the reputation of German scholars (Arnold, 1990). In his 1928 article, *Fundamental Questions of*

Prehistoric Research, he scrutinized Gobineau's doctrine on racial superiority and stated, "Racial philosophy in our time has mutated into racial fanaticism and has been extended into politics" (Arnold 1990). He was asked in 1933 to retract these statements publicly and he refused out right. Ernst Wahle took it upon himself to publish a critical analysis of Kossinna's theories, *On the Ethnic Interpretation of Prehistoric Cultural Provinces* (Arnold, 1990). Unfortunately most of this criticism was either ignored or censored for the public.

So how were these men able to get away with criticism against the research happening during this time? The first thing to understand is that Germans are known for their dedication to bureaucracy. There was no policy set up to deal with the critical faction at the time, so the only way to "take down" the critics was for Reinerth to attack their bloodlines.

Herman Wirth was, as described earlier, a Germanomaniac. Although he held that title, Wirth was a very likeable character who was energetic and charming. From the beginning, his ideas about prehistory were questionable at best. Wirth first became inspired when he noticed little wooden folk sculptures displayed on Frisian farmhouses in the Netherlands. He was struck by the assortment of shapes, crescents, crosses, shamrocks, stars, hearts, and etcetera. Wirth believed that he was seeing an ancient Nordic influence (Pringle, 2006). He then leapt to the conclusion that these symbols were the remnants of an ancient Aryan writing system- dating before the Egyptian hieroglyphs and even the Phoenician alphabet (Pringle, 2006). Researchers have failed to find any evidence that suggests Wirth's conclusions have substance. He went on to suggest that Atlantis, located in the North Atlantic between Iceland and the Azores, was the original homeland of the ancient Nordic civilization. His first major book, published in 1929, which included ramblings about the Nordic race and its origins and migrations received a large amount of criticism within and outside of Germany. The Swedish archaeologist Nils Aberg

warned about Wirth after attending one of his lectures, he wrote, “seemed harmless enough, but his visions of the murky past were intended to seduce unwitting Germans into dangerous dreams of racial superiority. . . .As such, his lectures were a thinly disguised call to action” (Pringle, 2006). This same Herman Wirth was the head of the Ahnenerbe from 1935 to 1937. During that time, he used its funding to launch the Ahnenerbe’s first exhibition abroad to Bohuslän, Sweden. In that region, there are tens of thousands of ancient engravings that Wirth believed were sacred texts left behind by the ancient Nordic race (Pringle, 2006). Unfortunately for Wirth, in 1937, Hitler finally took notice of the Ahnenerbe and dismissed him from his post. Hitler was not one to indulge Atlantean fantasies (Pringle, 2006).

THE AHNENERBE

Himmler’s prized organization was the Ahnenerbe, an elite Nazi institute. Dr. Herman Reischle, a curator of sorts for the Ahnenerbe, addresses its aims as such: “(1) to study the space, ideas, and achievements of the Indo-Germanic peoples; (2) to bring the research findings to life and present them to the German people; (3) to encourage every German to get involved in the process” (Haßmann, 2002). Privately and in reality, however, the organization produced myths about the German past. Some scholars within the Ahnenerbe twisted their facts purposefully to fit the correct mold, while others did so without being aware of it. The political and social biases came out in their results. (Pringle, 2006)

The Ahnenerbe boasted had over forty sections and institutes within itself that covered all types of subjects; and required a long list of professionals including: archaeologists, anthropologists, ethnologists, classicists, orientalist, biologists, musicologists, philologists, geologists, zoologists, botanists, linguists, folklorists, geneticists, astronomers, doctors, and

historians (Pringle, 2006). Haßmann (2002) describes Himmler's attitude toward the *goals* of archaeology in particular: "prehistory should demonstrate the pre-eminent position occupied by the Germans and their German predecessors since the beginning of civilization".

Much of the Ahnenerbe's work in the beginning of its existence could be considered pseudo-research projects. Some of the most notable of the pseudo-research projects were a part of the "*ding* places" (Germanic meeting places). These were sites that the Ahnenerbe deemed sacred or of great historical value among the ancient Aryans. The goal of these open air sites was to hold public rallies and hold an almost religious fascination with the Germanic cult sites. One of the most famous of these sites was the Externsteine, a sandstone formation believed to be an important ancient Germanic cult site (Pringle, 2006). Wilhelm Teudt interpreted the Externsteine as a Germanic Temple; a view shared by many young prehistorians, but received a large amount of criticism by mainstream scholars (Arnold, 1990). Koehl spoke on the subject by saying, "the second- and third-rate minds of the 'scientists' which the Ahnenerbe, for example, sponsored tended to make the SS 'research' the laughing stock of the universities Himmler wished to penetrate" (Arnold, 1990). Even Hitler was unimpressed by Himmler's prehistoric research. Albert Spencer, Hitler's chief architect, reported on Hitler complaining privately on this very topic:

Why do we call the whole world's attention to the fact that we have no past? It's bad enough that the Romans were erecting great building when our forefathers were still living in mud huts; now Himmler is starting to dig up these villages of mud huts and enthusing over every potsherd and stone axe he finds. All we prove by that is that we were still throwing stone hatchets and crouching around open fires when Greece and Rome had already reached the highest stage of culture. We should really do our best to keep quiet about this past. Instead Himmler makes a great fuss about it all. The present-day Romans must be having a laugh at these revelations. (Arnold, 1992)

This attitude served as the catalyst for change in the Ahnenerbe and around 1937, leadership of the institute changed hands from Herman Wirth to Walther Wüst, a well-known

Orientalist. Himmler was very excited by this new member as he had wanted to explore Asia and its connections with the Aryan race. It was Hans F.K. Günther who claimed that the elites of Asia were descendant from European conquerors, the Aryans. He suggested that the Aryans took two routes through Asia, a northern road, which led to China and Japan; and a southern road, which led to India and the land around it. Günther claimed that those on the southern road became like gods to the indigenous populations and the ancient Nordic explorers implemented the caste system to keep the bloodlines pure. And after some time, with their power stretched as far as Nepal and Northeastern India, he claimed that a Nordic couple gave birth to Buddha. (Pringle, 2006)

The German Tibet Expedition

Himmler grew attached to this idea of Nordic invaders from the North and began searching for a scientist who could find the evidence he needed. Ernst Schäfer, a zoologist, was the perfect candidate. Schäfer relayed to Himmler that when his crew was traveling near the Chinese-Tibetan border, they came across many individuals who had, as Schäfer described it, “pure Aryan facial characteristics, strong hook noses, red-black hair, and almost gray-blue eyes” (Pringle, 2006). He recognized that his so-called discovery had big implications for Germany’s *Rassenkunde* experts, race scientists. Immediately Schäfer began preparations for an expedition to Tibet. And after several obstacles including, a Japanese-Chinese conflict, an impending World War II, and the accidental death of his new wife, Schäfer and his small team (Wienert, Geer, Krause, and Beger) left for Calcutta in mid-April 1938 (Pringle, 2006).

While the expedition team spent time on in the Sikkim highlands, making facial and body measurements and casts, Schäfer was searching for a legitimate reason to cross the border into Tibet. Finally a member of the Sikkimese royal family showed up to their camp and was so well

cared for, that in December of 1938, the expedition team was invited to the capital of Tibet for a two-week stay. Hardly any Europeans had ever been given the opportunity to see the capital, so this was a great honor. (Pringle, 2006)

Throughout their stay in the small country, Bruno Berger continued to make casts and take measurements of as many people as would allow him. While Berger was focused on the people of Tibet, the rest of the team was out collecting plants, animals, and insects to bring back to the homeland for study. In August of 1939, the five scientists returned home successful and filled with information (Pringle, 2006). Schäfer was quite confident that the facial and skull measurements taken in Tibet would give sufficient proof of the ancient Nordic invaders (Pringle, 2006). Germans across the country were enthralled with the expedition in Tibet and for the first time, Hitler seemed to take a genuine interest in the activities of the Ahnenerbe.

Tiwanaku

Tibet was not the only expedition the Ahnenerbe had planned. Edmund Kiss was also in the process of planning a mission to the Tiwanaku site in the Bolivian Andes. Kiss was under the impression that it was not the indigenous Andean people who built the temples at Tiwanaku, but a group of Nordic immigrants who had traveled to South America from the far west. In 1928, when Kiss went to Tiwanaku, the structure known as the Gateway to the Sun caught his eye (Pringle, 2006). After studying the carvings on the structure, Kiss believed that the markings were an ancient Nordic calendar (Figure 2) that he was sure he could decipher.

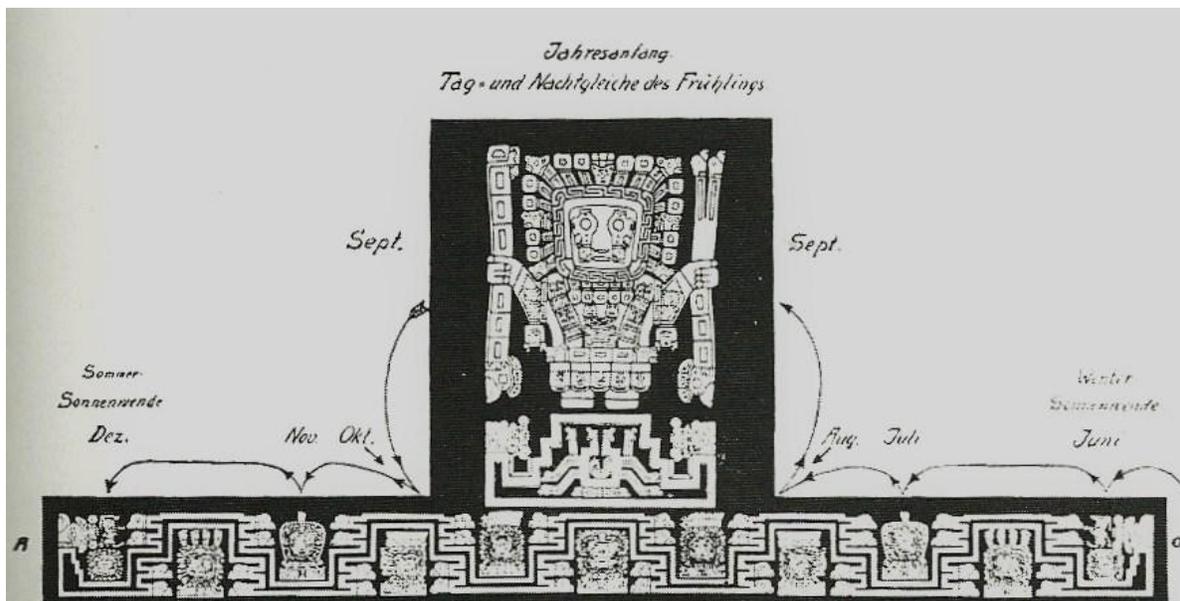


Figure 2. Edmund Kiss' Nordic Calendar from the Gateway to the Sun in Tiwanaku (Pringle, 2006)

Edmund Kiss was so sure about his discovery that he came to a rather wild conclusion: “One thing we do know—and it would be extremely hard to convince us otherwise—even if the age of Tiwanaku cannot even be guessed, it must be at least millions of years old!” (Pringle, 2006) Unfortunately for Kiss, he was never able to go back and find out if his hypothesis was correct. The expedition was later canceled due to a lack of funding and the outbreak of the Second World War (Hale, 2003).

Propaganda

Another one of Himmler’s main goals with the Ahnenerbe was to teach the public about their great Germanic ancestors. Not only did he want the people of Germany and future colonists to learn about their past, but he wanted the public to revert back to that ancient culture. Himmler employed scholars to study the clan symbols and retrieve details on the ancient Nordic religion and religious practices; he brought in engineers to study the building styles of the ancient Germanic tribes. He also had botanists and zoologists work to restore the original Germanic breeds. Himmler was bringing together as many disciplines under the Ahnenerbe as he could, in order to get the most comprehensive look at the Aryan past. (Pringle, 2006)

With all this information at hand, scholars across the board were encouraged to publish and popularize their findings (Pringle, 2006). Lectures were given and articles were published under the Ahnenerbe’s own press, the *Ahnenerbe-Stiftung Verlag*, which allowed them to avoid an impartial peer review of their work (Pringle, 2006). The Nazi Party used prehistoric imagery to capture the attentions of the people. This propaganda was found in several contexts including: posters requesting for contributions to the *Winterhilfswerk*, the WHW or the Winter Relief Fund. One in this series of posters depicted a Viking ship with an armed warrior nearby. The slogan for the WHW in 1935 and 1936 was “Full Sail into Battle in Support of the WHW”. Advertisements

also used prehistoric symbolism in their products; for example, there was a shoe polish company which gave out a series of picture cards illustrating scenes from “German Prehistory” (Haßmann, 2002).

Popular magazines were used in this educational movement as well. One such title was *Frauen Warte*, or Women’s Sentinel. This 1939 issue featured an article entitled, “The Timeless Heritage of Our Ancestors” (Haßmann, 2002). On the cover (Figure 3), Viking ships are sailing off to war while the wife/mother figure watches proudly with the children (a son and a daughter) from ashore. Images like this one suggest war-readiness, sons bearing arms and taking after the father, and the role of women in society (Haßmann, 2002).

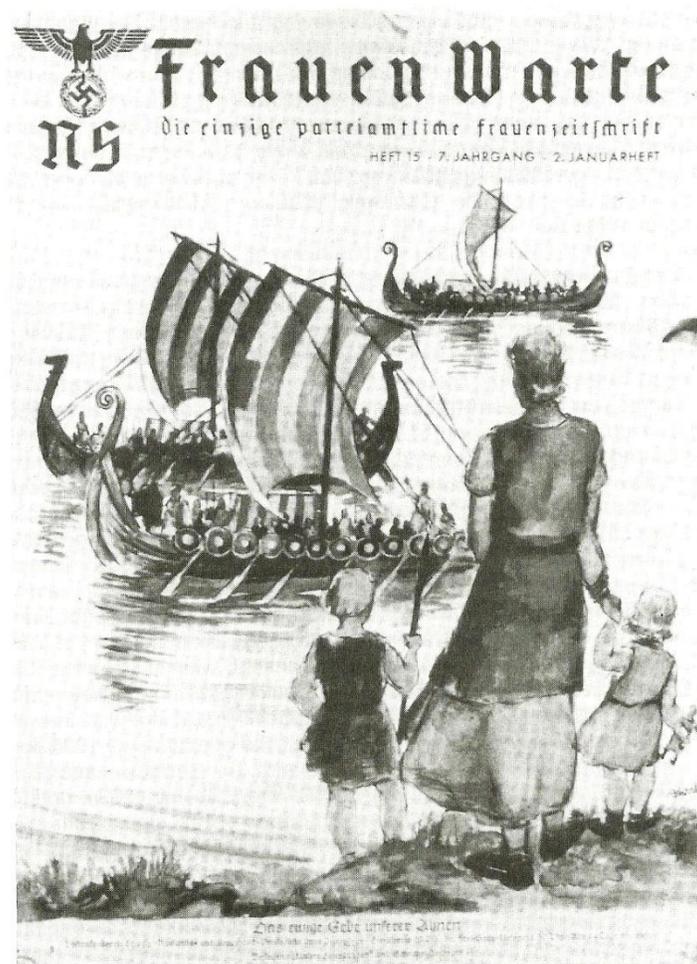


Figure 3. The 1939 cover of *Frauen Warte*, a Nazi women’s magazine (Haßmann, 2002)

National Socialist ways of thinking also permeated into the schools and subjects. Most schools had courses on the importance of bloodline, race, and race detection (Blackburn, 1985). History and prehistory was also taught quite differently. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler mentions how history should be carried out in the schools: “Especially in historical instruction an abridgement of the material must be undertaken” (Blackburn, 1985). Hitler stressed the importance of creating a dynamic history for students. He wanted them to leave school with a superior sense of self and race, as well as a sense of pride in their Germanic ancestors (Blackburn, 1985). The Ahnenerbe worked hard to provide all the answers to the questions about the origins of the Aryans.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

How did the shift to prehistoric archaeology influence the scholars of the time and how did the politics of the day affect archaeological interpretation? These are the two questions that I posed in the beginning of this paper. In this final section, both research questions will be addressed and discussed in greater detail.

How did the shift to prehistoric archaeology influence the scholars of the time? As previously discussed, prehistory was not well liked in the academic landscape. So when the National Socialists showed an interest in pre-history, even though it was a highly nationalistic interest, scholars jumped at the chance to be a part of it. Soon after the Nazis obtained power, academic positions in universities around Germany opened up positions in pre-and protohistory. It is understandable how some scholars were so tempted to take advantage and move up the social ladder. These scholars, including Hans Reinerth, Oswald Menghin, and Hermann Wirth, were labeled as the Party-Liners. Others took a different approach and simply kept quiet. It is unsure how much they knew of what was going on, but I cannot imagine that all those people

working at the university level could not fully comprehend what was going on around them; unless they purposefully put the blinders up. This seems the most logical, as it was what many in Germany did during that time: keep their heads down and do not question the authority. As understandable as it is to “put the blinders up”, their silence was still a contributing factor to the continued manipulation of prehistoric archaeology. The final category that scholars of the time fell into was the Opposition. This group, as discussed earlier, included those scholars who were forced out of their positions and those who were lucky enough or smart enough to criticize with caution from the inside. It feels very easy to criticize some of these scholars for their behavior or even their theories on race. Nevertheless, it is important to think about their situations from their point-of-view; not to give them an excuse for the behavior, rather a way for us to understand *how* the racism and data manipulation was able to flourish.

That brings me to my second question: how did the politics of the day affect archaeological interpretation? As stated previously, a feeling of intense nationalism saturated prehistoric archaeology. Ethnocentrism, as well, seemed to be all over the discipline during this period. The unrelenting force of it can be easily seen in Himmler’s Ahnenerbe Institute. In universities today, we discuss the importance of being aware of our biases and working around them. Archaeologists, who remained unaware of the ethnocentrism in their culture while under the Third Reich, unknowingly encouraged and helped to promote the conquering of foreign land, the deaths of the so-called inferior races, and destruction of archaeological sites. Certainly, I do not mean to imply that this is a situation that will occur again; however, it is important to study the extreme cases to get an all encompassing awareness of what has happened and what is possible.

Problems and Further Research

The main problem that I continued to come across throughout this project was the lack of explicit descriptions of archaeological data that had been manipulated. I would have loved to have detailed examples of data manipulation; however all I found was second- and third-hand reports which I had to trust. I did come across one site report for Haithabu that Herbert Jahnkuhn excavated, unfortunately the report was in German, and my German language skills are not quite ready to be able to distinguish any kind of data manipulation. Even then, Jahnkuhn was not known to have purposefully manipulated any data from the site; it is in his interpretations, in the Introduction and Conclusion that his nationalistic tendencies emerged.

In the future, I would love to see the explicit descriptions of archaeological data distortion that occurred under the Third Reich. The only way a project like that would work, however, is if it were specifically intended for use by archaeologists. I found that many of the resources I used during this project were directed towards a more general reader; not necessarily an archaeology student. Nevertheless, I understand now how an archaeologist could get caught up in a movement like the National Socialists. It is very important for students in archaeology and anthropology to learn about situations like that in Germany under the Third Reich. Influences and biases are all around us; all we can do is remain aware and work patiently around them.

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