RICE UNIVERSITY

THE GERMAN HUMANISTS' CONCEPTION OF GERMANIA

by

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ABSTRACT

With the crusades and the vast movement and intermingling of diverse peoples that they entailed began the breakdown of the old medieval theory of life. Heretofore life had been centered on the Universal Church, and not on the convictions and conscience of the individual. Cultural differences had been minimized. The crusades awakened a new cultural awareness in which these differences became manifest. The European peoples now had others with which to compare themselves. Man himself, as an individual, and the world in which he found himself, came into closer scrutiny. **Diesseits**, as opposed to **Jenseits**, was rediscovered.

The Humanist Movement in Germany is a part of this general intellectual awakening in Europe that began in Italy with the Renaissance. **Zurück auf die Quellen** came to stand for a new religious enlightenment and individual reevaluation and investigation of the old original sources. Man's inner conflict, **zwivel**, came to the fore, and the individual began to search for his own **raison d'etre**.

The early German Humanists prepared the way by dedicating themselves to translating and assimilating the newly discovered material and bringing it into the widest possible circles. They imitated the ancients in their letters and this imitation was urged in the educational ideas of the time. By the end of the 15th century Humanism began to be viewed by its chief proponents as worthy of personal renewal.
In contemporary life. The period of mere imitation was over. The Humanists wanted to experience the energy of humanistic ideals within themselves on a personal level and share their ideas with others, thereby bringing about a change in the attitudes of the time.

The German Humanists were particularly conscious of the reputation their country had as the "land of barbarians." The Italians of the time were in the forefront in scholarship and Humanism in Italy had taken root early. They were haughtily conscious of their achievements and hastened to designate themselves as being the true descendants of ancient greatness. They lost no chance to point these things out to visiting German Humanists.

These developments gave great impetus to the Germans and they went back into their own history and made efforts to establish a place for the Reich in Europe as a nation of standing with a separate cultural entity and genuine historic tradition. They had their most lasting influence in the area of historical study.

By their barbs the Italians did much to stimulate the national pride of the German Humanists. The search for national identity, however, carried with it an inherent paradox. How was it possible for the Humanists to reconcile their surge of patriotism and enthusiasm for things German with their use of Latin and adoration for the ancient Romans? It is the purpose of this thesis to examine the nationalism of German Humanism and to discover a thread of consistency
in the divergent manifestations of this new patriotic pride.

To the modern ear, the inflammatory nationalistic statements by some of the Humanists sound very different from the subdued poems to the glorification of German landscape and cities written by others. As these extremes are reconciled it will be possible to place Humanist patriotism within the context of the times and discover the function of nationalism within the Weltanschauung of German Humanism.
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CHAPTER ONE
THE SEARCH FOR CULTURAL IDENTITY

If the patriotism of the German Humanists was far from the nationalism of the present century, it was equally as far from the universalism of the Middle Ages. Although the Humanists did have an influence on the mounting tide of German patriotism which was to play a crucial role in the Reformation, many of them remained content with merely encouraging cultural autonomy distinct and apart from Italian or French influences. They devoted most of their efforts to rid the educated world of the notion that Germany was a nation of barbarians. Ulrich von Hutten, in one of his letters to Pirckheimer, indicates the enthusiasm and vitality felt by the Humanists: "O Jahrhundert! O Wissenschaften! Es ist eine Freude zu leben, wenn auch noch nicht, sich zur Ruhe zu setzen, mein Wilibald. Es blühen die Studien, die Geister regen sich: Du, nimm den Strich, Barbarei, und mache dich auf Verbanung gefasst!"¹

The Humanists viewed themselves and their projects, of course, as a major step toward the goal of a new cultural awareness of the land of their birth. They constantly encouraged and congratulated one another in the course of

¹H. M. Richter, Geistesströmungen (Berlin, 1875), p. 50.
their activities. Many of the Italians had been most indiscreet and had done much to stimulate the Humanists' national pride. One papal legate to the Reichstag in 1471 wrote letters to friends heavily criticizing the Germans for their rough speech and crude way of life. Conrad Celtis responded with a call to cultural rivalry with the Italians.  

One of the early Humanists, Agricola, had hoped that Germany could free herself of the charges of barbarism and lack of eloquence. Later, Mutian is much more optimistic as he congratulates some of the younger Humanist instructors at the University of Wittenberg for "they are freeing themselves from barbarism."  

To augment their debarbarization campaign, the Humanists endeavored to thoroughly revamp the curriculum in the universities. Up to this time the universities had been an arm of the Church and a major factor in the loss of cultural identity among the Germans. Too, it was in the universities that pedantic scholasticism held sway. Germany was losing many of her students to foreign seats of learning. Celtis, for one, felt that Germany might one day be able to attract the Italians to educate themselves in Germany, and that German students of law and medicine would not feel compelled to study in Italy.


Unfortunately, with the emphasis on written and spoken Latin, Humanist education in general was also artificial and sterile. "Die Humanisten haben das Mögliche geleistet, um die Blüte der auf Universitäten gebildeten deutschen Jugend ihrer eigenen Nationalität zu entfremden. Was sie durch Verbreitung der classischen Werke genützt haben, leidet keinen Vergleich mit dem unermesslichen Schaden, den durch sie der deutsche Geist gelitten hat, indem sie an die Stelle des Glaubens eine fade Witzelei, an die Stelle der altdeutschen Tugend die ganze Frivolität und Ébourderie der Renaissance setzten."\(^4\)

Though Mr. Menzel is justified in his criticism of the Humanists' pedantic insistence on the use of Latin, he overlooks the paradox inherent in the Humanist Movement and its function in bringing the Renaissance with its new modes of thinking to Germany. Though they were at first preoccupied with bringing Latin studies to Germany, the Humanists were themselves carried along and gradually changed by the ever widening effects of Renaissance thinking. As part of a transitional movement which had been instrumental in introducing the Renaissance to Germany, the Humanists were rapidly bypassed and their notions antiquated by events and ideas which they themselves had set in motion, but over which they had very little understanding or control.

In considering the patriotism of the Humanists and the relatively small imprint the movement left within the context of German national literature, one cannot disregard their motives and the nature of the movement itself. The Humanists were a haughty lot and they wrote only for one another within their own elite societies in a language not generally understood by their countrymen. "Die Sodalitäten bleiben auch nach ihrer örtlichen Teilung eine Zusammenfassung des humanistisch-literarischen Deutschlands und verkörpern so den neuen Nationalitätsbegriff." The Humanists conceived of a type of poetic "armchair nationalism" and strived to maintain their standing as Latin scholars while at the same time writing of things German to show that Germans were just as, if not more, capable as the Humanists to the South. When the Italians labeled Germany as "barbarous" the Humanists took it as a personal affront. Their search for evidence of past German glory was not a national movement but an effort to justify themselves and prove their own gentility as men of letters, ergo, they could demand that they not be taken lightly by their foreign peers. Thus, they were not prepared for, nor could they conceive of a religious-nationalistic movement of the magnitude of Luther's Reformation.

Humanistic endeavor later admittedly had a great influence on events leading to the Reformation, but only as

individual Humanists separated themselves from the "Humanist mentality," i.e., quest for personal glory and the exclusive club-like atmosphere, and wholly dedicated themselves to bringing to the masses Humanistic ideas and continuing to develop them. However, the movement as a whole, confronted with the implications of the Reformation, became increasingly irrelevant and less meaningful for the development of a national, truly German literature. In religious questions as well as in political affairs, inherent in Humanism was the feeling that institutions were not important; that the human spirit stands above specific affiliations with an organization. "Die Gemeinschaft der Humanisten war eben viel mehr eine der Gesinnung als eine der Methoden, und auch da ist es auffallend, wie wenig die Arbeiten der einen den andern wirklich zugute kommen." The Humanist Movement was not envisioned as a society to change the basic structure and orientation of the Germans. The Humanists only intended to help their country gain respect within the established order as no mere province of peasants, but as a potentially vibrant and intellectual contributor to the general welfare.

One must remember that German Humanism was a part of the transition from the relative intellectual regimentation of the Middle Ages to the outbreak of the Reformation and the political, social, and intellectual upheavals that came with it. The mere act of encouraging Germans to study the

classics in their own universities was a step toward greater independent thinking. Sprengel describes the Renaissance and Humanism as "zwei sich durchdringende und wieder getrennt verlaufende Wellen aus gemeinsamer Quelle, eine individualistische Strömung mit der Richtung gegen die Gebundenheit des mittelalterlichen Menschen auf allen Lebensgebieten, entsprungen aus dem Sehnen nach geistig-seelischer Wiedergeburt, nach einer vita nuova, geführt von neuen Erkenntnissen, getragen von wirtschaftlichem und politischem Umenschwung."

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The Humanists were interested in creating a new awareness of things German in literature and history. Their chief efforts were in literary activities but it was in precisely this area that they had little lasting influence. It was their influence in the intellectual awakening that the Humanists played their most conspicuous role in helping to bring about a German national awareness and vitality. They found themselves in the anomalous position of unwittingly setting in motion events, the far-reaching effects of which were totally beyond the new literary awareness they had had in mind.

In churchly matters, the Humanists went back to the sources, partly in an effort to find out just how Rome was mismanaging the Church. So also in the drive to establish

7Johann Georg Sprengel, Der Staatsgedanke in der deutschen Richtung von Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart (Berlin, 1933), p. 25.
their own national identity, they returned to the writings of the ancients. After being subjected to so much ridicule from the Italians, who prided themselves on being the direct heirs of ancient greatness and culture, the German Humanists began to show signs of paranoia which manifested itself in several interesting ways. "Bebel und Wimpeling schuldigten sogar die Römer und Griechen an, sie hätten die Verdienste der Deutschen absichtlich totgeschwiegen, um ihnen die Anerkennung der Nachwelt zu stehlen. In der gleichen Linie liegt es, wenn Albert Krantz den Italienern vorwarf, sie besessen den vollständigen Tacitus, hielten aber aus Missgunst gegen die Deutschen die unbekannten Teile zurück."3

Bebel went on to maintain in his Proverbia Germanica that "die alten deutschen ihre Philosophie gehabt hätten, die sich wohl mit den griechischen Weisen messen könne."9 Bebel also felt that Germany was "die Ur- und Hauptnation Europas"10 and the "rechter Herr aller Völker."11

Conrad Celtis called the Germans "Träger einer uralten Kultur"12 and during a journey through Bohemia he wrote his friend Adelmann, "Ich gebe mich ohne Anstand als Deutschen

8Willy Andreas, Deutschland vor der Reformation, 6th ed. (Stuttgart, 1932), p. 516.
9Geschichtsauffassung, p. 106.
10ibid., p. 141.
11ibid., p. 179.
12ibid., p. 141.
aus und bin stolz darauf einer zu sein." In the year 1491 Celtis went to Prague but was forced to cut his stay short, "da er durch mehrere Spottgedichte und beissende Epigramme gegen die Tschechen, ihre Lebensweise, ihre utraquistischen Tendenzen, wie ihren nationalen Fanatismus, den Zorn des Prager Pöbels hervorgerufen hatte und so das Weite suchen musste."

Jakob Wimpfeling, particularly, betrayed a proclivity for making sweeping nationalistic statements. In his enthusiasm for the inventor of the printing press, he wrote, "Wir Deutsche beherrschen fast den ganzen geistigen Markt des gebildeten Europas." Despite the dubious "historical proof" and superficial research Wimpfeling used to support his extreme positions, he nevertheless had very dogmatic ideas concerning Kaiser, Reich, Church, and the relationship of the German people to these institutions. "Wimpfelings Reichs- und Kaiseridee ist absolutistisch im strengsten Sinne des Wortes: er kennt nur ein Reich, nur einen Kaiser, dem von Rechts wegen die Herrschaft über die ganze Welt gehört."

The move for independence by the Swiss outraged

\[13\] H. M. Richter, Geistesströmungen (Berlin, 1875), p. 52.
\[14\] Ibid., p. 53.
\[16\] Ibid., p. 208.
Wimpfeling. His pamphlet denouncing them made him the most hated man in Switzerland and travel there became impossible for him because of the danger of bodily harm. The pamphlet, *Soliloquium pro pace Christianorum*,... was in the form of a prayer to Christ and denounced the Swiss. It includes the idea, "... dass nur ein bäurisches, halbwildes Volk, das überhaupt kein Gesetz und keine Ordnung kenne, eine solche Frevelthat begehen konnte. (sic)"\(^17\) He goes on to say, "Wo ist der Papst, der sie von diesem Gehorsam befreit hat, wo ist die betreffende Bulle? ... Die Leute sagen, sie dienten den Reich. Was ist denn das Reich? Wer repräsentiert das Reich, wenn nicht das Königs Majestät im Verein mit den Kurfürsten, wie die katholische Kirche ihr Fundament hat in Papst und Kardinalen?"\(^18\)

Wimpfeling, along with other Humanists of his day, deluded himself into thinking that with Kaiser Maximilian, the Reich would begin a period of eternal glory and happiness. He desperately wanted das Volk to return to what he considered the idyllic life of a primitive and virtuous Germany, the time of "Deutscher Männer Wirken und frommes Schaffen und deutscher Frauen Tugend und Züchtigkeit."\(^19\) He felt, "dass Land und Volk der Deutschen auf der weiten Welt keinen Rivalen haben, dass es etwas Köstliches ist um das Glück,

\(^{17}\) *ibid.*, p. 209.
\(^{18}\) *ibid.*, p. 211.
\(^{19}\) *ibid.*, p. 156.
Deutscher zu sein und im gesegneten deutschen Lande, zumal im Elsass mit seiner prächtigen Natur und seinem prächtigen Menschenschlage, seinem herrlichen Wein und seinen herrlichen Geistern, zu wohnen."\(^{20}\)

With all his feeling for Kaiser and Reich, Wimpfeling was first and foremost a Stammespatriot. He was from Alsace and was involved in bitter battles defending the German-ness of his home province. With characteristic stubbornness and incredible historical distortions he contested the gradual shift of Alsace into the French sphere of influence.

It is recorded that Julius Caesar had regarded the left bank of the Rhine as part of Gaul. Therefore, Alsace too would at one time have been a part of this territory. This fact, however, did not faze Wimpfeling. "... er korrigiert den römischen Schriftsteller einfach, indem er bemerkt, Cäsar habe nicht beachtet, 'dass in mittel zwischen dem rechten Frankreich und dem Rin gelegen syg die Hochstrass und das Gebirg der Wasichen, durch welche dasselb Teil tätisches Landes, so anstoss des Rins ist, von dem frankreichschen Land hett doch gemacht unterschiden werden.'\(^{21}\)

Wimpfeling also went about proving the Deutschtum of the area with hand-picked "gloubwürdigen Gezügen (Zeugen)" and "den bewertsten Geschichtsschribern."\(^{22}\) One such


conjecture concerns itself "mit der deutschen Nationalität
Pipins des Kurzen, die an der Hand auswärtiger Quellen und
auf Grund eines im Elsass ganz üblichen Sprichwortes (!)
(sic) über die Klugheit Pipins dargethan wird."²³

Erasmus, the Humanist with the most lasting influence,
indicates his position toward the Reich and patriotism in
general as being one of cool, dispassionate non-involvement,
especially in the petty conflicts surrounding these issues.
Yet, perhaps in spite of himself, he was the most influential
in bringing Germany out of the Middle Ages. "In den Adagia
des Erasmus werden die historischen Gestalten zeitlos, sie
haben für ihn eine ewige Bedeutung oder gar keine. Vollends
den Lieblingsideen in der Geschichtschreibung des deutschen
Humanismus steht Erasmus ganz fremd gegenüber. Auch nachdem
er sich von seinen elsässischen Freunden das Wort: Germania
nostra hat entwinden lassen, bleiben ihm die Fragen nach
Wert und Bedeutung des deutschen Volkstums so fern, wie die
Sprache des Landes, in dem er doch so viele Jahre verbrachte.
Und dass die ebenso eifrig von allen deutschen Patrioten
gehegte Idee von der kaiserlichen Weltherrschaft, der Erneu-
erung des alten Imperium Romanum bei ihm keinen Boden fand,
kann die Vorrede zum Sueton lehren. Was er aber dafür als
sein Ideal bot, einen Bund christlicher Fürsten, das blieb
in noch nebelhafteren Umrissen, als es selbst bei Occam
gewesen war. Auch die Türkenfrage beurteilte er kühler als
²³ibid.
In spite of the divergence of views among the Humanists concerning the place and influence of Germany in the world, the ultimate question of the Germans as part of a supra-national religious and political system remained undisputed by most of them, at least before the agony of reassessment forced by the Reformation. Their concept of nationalism was one of intellectual independence within the Establishment as evidenced by their continued use of Latin. They advocated a stronger German voice and German influence in the religious and political affairs of the Church and desired to have their capabilities recognized, no longer as followers but as leaders.

In Wimpeling, we can sense some of the contradictions in which the Humanists became involved. On the one hand, he longed for a return of the virtues of a primitive Germany while on the other hand he demanded almost complete outward subservience to the Roman Church with its Latin forms of worship. With his advocacy of renewed German cultural awareness, however, he undermined the very authority of the Church, which he considered so important.

Erasmus, perhaps more than any other, encouraged and was himself an example of this new German intellectual independence in areas of secular concern as well as within the

24 Gesichtsau&ffassung, p. 106.
religious structure of the Church. Nationalism, per se, with its possible reverberations in a system he basically favored, had no meaning for him. Therefore he failed to appreciate the effect of events which he himself had done so much to set in motion. Since the independence of the Reformation went far beyond anything he had envisioned, he felt forced to renounce any connection with it.
CHAPTER TWO
HUMANISTIC HISTORICAL ENDEAVOR

At a time when the Germans were seeking to establish themselves as a Kultur einheit, the Humanists began to cull through the records and manuscripts of their people in an effort to rediscover the glory of the past. Though the versification and oration of the Humanists is now largely ignored, their imprint on the study of history has remained. It is in the writing of history where the influence of Humanism has been most permanent. Though some of their endeavors were carried to excess, many of the Humanists made valuable contributions to the reconstruction of the Germanic past.


Much of this historical investigation only amounted to collections of various quotes from old chronicles and

annals and the uncritical throwing together of Greek and
Roman sources, regardless of whether they were relevant or
not. Franz Friedlieb, or Irenikus, was the editor of a pot¬
pourri of this sort, the *Exegesis Germaniae*, which consisted
of eight separate books or sections "'von tüchtigem Umfang.'" 26
Completed in 1517, the massive work covers such disparate
topics as German geography, Germanic archaeology, a history
of German wars from "the beginning" up to the time of Kaiser
Maximilian, and an historical-geographic section with his-
torical notes concerning cities, cloisters, landscapes and
particularly the genealogies of the princes and bishops
ruling them. Neither is the fertility of German soil nor a
study of German water supply (*Bewässerung*) neglected in the
43 chapters devoted to those subjects.

Joachimsen says, "Der erste Eindruck des Buches ist
verwirrend. Man möchte sagen, es ist, wie ein Schlachtge-
mälde ... , vollgestopft mit Figuren. Eine unendliche
Schar von Zeugnissen stürmt auf uns ein." 27 In his pre-
historical survey of the Germans, Irenikus ventured some
fantastic conjecture concerning the valor and deeds of the
old Goths that even outdid Celtis and Bebel with their
fanciful theories of former German glory. It seems that
Pirckheimer, who admired what he considered the simple virtue
of the Goths, played an influential role in this. He wrote

26 *Geschichtsauffassung*, p. 170.
27 ibid., p. 173.
Irenikus a letter in which he urged the inclusion of these wonderful stories of the old Germans for the specific purpose of arousing the envy of the Italians. "Zwar schrieb Willibald Pirckheimer dem Irenikus eine Vorrede, worin er das Unternehmen als Erfüllung patriotischer Wünsche pries, und nicht minder begeistert äußerte sich Mutianus Rufus darüber, denn nun sei es bewiesen, dass Deutschland älter sei als Italien, Griechenland und ganz Europa!" Unlike even Bebel, who was also a strong patriot but believed that the Goths were barbaric, Irenikus was convinced that the Goths were the genuine Germans and the true inheritors of the Roman Empire with all its culture.

"Es gibt kein zweites Geschichtswerk [Exegesis Germaniae], in dem sich das jugendliche Stürmen und Drängen des deutschen Humanismus, sein leidenschaftliches Streben, universal zu sein, nicht im Sinne der formgewaltigen Italiener, sondern im Sinne eines faustischen allwissensdranges, in dem sich endlich der politische und kulturelle Optimismus des um die Jahrhundertwende heranwachsenden Geschlechts so deutlich ausspricht wie hier."\(^{29}\)

Conrad Celtis, for lack of critical examination of the sources, also mixes myths and fables into his histories of the origins of the Germanic peoples. Celtis did, however, make major and genuine contributions to these efforts. His

\(^{28}\) Andreas, p. 512.

\(^{29}\) Geschichtsauffassung, p. 183,
book on Nuremberg, the *Norimberga*, was in its genre a masterpiece. He describes in detail the structure of the city, the public and private buildings, the characteristics of the people, the religious life, the civic government, and the material prosperity of the city.

The *Norimberga* is also a portrayal of the personality of Celtis himself. His description is living and vibrant, marked by a warm human interest. There is none of the stale imitation and dullness that characterized the activities of earlier Humanists. He concludes his tribute to the city with a stirring prayer: "So we beseech you, oh immortal gods, if our prayer can yet avail something, that you preserve and defend our city in its prosperity, welfare, and lasting stability. May you the guardian tutelary gods, rulers of the fates of lands and cities, preserve with protective hand the blessings of good fortune as long as the firmament bears the stars and the wind moves the waves!"\(^{30}\)

The Humanists widely publicized their intentions and plans, but somehow nothing much ever came of them. Celtis planned to prepare a *Germania illustrata*, a book designed to illustrate his Germany, its past, its geographic setting, its cities, and its people, but it never appeared. "Im übrigen weiss man, dass die Humanisten überall, so auch in Italien, den Mund reichlich voll zu nehmen pflegten und die

Deutschen standen damit nicht allein da, wenn manche ihrer pompösen Ankündigungen nur Fanfarenblasen bleiben."

Despite his faults, Celtis did much to awaken a German consciousness and pride. He was one of the chief figures in the movement to establish "das Vaterland landschaftlich, stammlich und geschichtlich."

Celtis also made some sensational manuscript discoveries of old literary treasures. He brought to the attention of the public the codex of the six dramas of Roswitha, which had been almost forgotten for centuries in the St. Emmeran Monastery at Regensburg. Roswitha, the Saxon nun of Gandersheim, had written legends and dramas during the Ottonian Renaissance in the 10th century. Celtis went to Elector Friedrich von Sachsen with the manuscript and Friedrich sanctioned its printing and dedication with a copyright proviso that it not be reprinted for ten years. It appeared in 1501 in Nuremberg under the title, Opera Roswithae illustris virginis et monialis germanae, gente Saxonica ortae, nuper a Conrade Celte inventa.

The second of Celtis' major finds was an historical document in verse form, the Ligurinus, which praised the great deeds of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa in an epic poem of ten books. Celtis located it in the Ebrach Monastery in Franken and had it published in Augsburg in 1507 under the title,

Ligurinus sive de rebus gestis Friderici I, imperatoris libri X. Even though the authorship of the poem was in dispute from the very beginning, it was well suited for satisfying the patriotic feelings of the Humanists, to whom Barbarossa appealed as an heroic figure and the ideal emperor.

Celtis also brought to light a copy of a famous map of the Roman Empire in the third century, the Tabula Peutingeriana. It showed the Roman military roads, the army camps, and cities, giving all distances in Roman miles and depicted the whole Roman world from Spain to the Ganges. He willed it to his friend Peutinger and it now is on display in Vienna.

In his Inaugural Oration of 1492 at the University of Ingolstadt, Celtis attempts "to formulate a new educational ideal and the powerful drive of national patriotism, mainly romantic and cultural, but with implied political overtones." As part of this patriotic feeling, Celtis decried the neglect in Germany of the precious stores of books in monasteries, which were ignored and subjected to weather damage. For all of Celtis' plans and talk, however, most of his projects never became workable or concrete.

Celtis' own attitude for and handling of his priceless manuscripts is interesting indeed. This attitude is indicative of practically the entire concept and intent of

Humanist "scholarship." Even though the Humanists did make certain lasting contributions to the renewed research into the country's past, their projects still retained an air of dilettantism. They seemed more interested in impressing one another and receiving honors from the nobility than in researching a solid legacy of sources and material to be further developed. Celtis always told the prior at the monasteries he was "borrowing" the manuscripts, but he somehow forgot to return them. The Ligurinus, for instance, has never been rediscovered. Celtis never made copies of the manuscripts and, in addition to sending them around to friends, wrote his own notations in the margins and sent them directly to the printers to pick up additional ink smudges and thumb prints. "Dr. Lorenz Beheim wrote to Pirckheimer when he heard of Celtis' plans for publishing the Ligurinus: 'He does well in undertaking the publication of Ligurinus, for he thereby will turn his thievery to the public good. For I know who was with him when he received that book from the monastery of Ebrach. Although it was only lent to him, he has not returned it to this day.'"

Of all the German Humanists, Beatus Rhenanus remains the only one who was able to view the Germanic past critically and dispassionately. He selected his sources carefully and examined them critically. The destruction of the Roman
Empire by the Germanic tribes was not particularly viewed with pride by him. He admired the organization of the Roman Empire and felt that the only thing in favor of the barbarians was their untainted freedom. "Es gibt keinen zweiten Historiker des deutschen Humanismus, der so bestimmt von der Erzählung fort und zur Zustandsschilderung hinstrebt." 35

But Rhenanus stood alone in his efforts toward the direction of genuine historical scholarship. He alone was willing to make a stand for fact and against phantasy and wishful thinking. "... die kühle Beurteilung der Kriegstaten wie der Weltherrschaftsidee, die Hervorhebung des Friedens als Ergebnis der Zivilisation, vor allem aber der Zusammenhang zwischen Religion und Bildung, das alles ist erasmisch. So hätte Erasmus eine deutsche Geschichte angesehen." 36

In tracing the history and development of the various Germanic tribes, one of the things that distinguishes Rhenanus is his understanding and interpretation of the continuity of the development of language. "Aber der Hauptgrund der Sonderstellung des Rhenanus ist doch, dass seine Methode grundsätzlich von der seiner meisten Zeitgenossen verschieden war. Mit dieser Methode steht er eigentlich schon in der Zeit, wo der Humanismus Philologie geworden ist, Philologie im Sinne von Scheidekunst. ... Was Rhenanus anstrebte, die

35_Geschichtsauffassung, p. 140.
36 Ibid., p. 142.
leidenschaftslose Betrachtung der deutschen Vergangenheit als eines toten Objekts gelehrter Forschung—es ist bedeutsam, dass auch diese Zeit ihm eine 'antiquitas' ist—das konnte und wollte der deutsche Humanismus nicht."

Because the work of Beatus Rhenanus was not typical of the Humanism of the time, a school was not founded under his auspices. In many ways he remained a man before his time.

Kaiser Maximilian with his court in Vienna was the focal point around which the Humanists could concentrate their efforts. Kaiser Maximilian was interested in and sponsored the plans of Celtis and those following him for a *Germania illustrata*. His chief historical interest, however, was in the history of his own forbears, their heroic deeds, and the royal dynastic line of the Empire. He created the office of court historian specifically for this purpose and felt that it was important to find ancestors with sufficient heroic stature and chivalrous credentials to outdo his royal rivals. He had his chroniclers trace his family tree back to Noah and encouraged a goodly amount of myth and fable to round the chronicle out.

The Humanists took great pains to prove the German-ness of the Kaisers since Charlemagne and fought the Italian Roman Catholic interpretation of the origin of the Kaiser. Yet they also put great emphasis on the theory that linked the German Kaisers to those of Imperial Rome. They were

37ibid., p. 145.
sure that none of the characteristics of the line had been lost.

Johannes Cuspinianus, one of Maximilian's court historians, was also a statesman, orator and philologist. Cuspinian did not interest himself in the divergent views then extant concerning German history. He wrote his most famous historical piece from the standpoint of the contemporary politics of the Austrian state, especially that of Kaisers Friedrich III and Maximilian. Although Maximilian was to Cuspinian the embodiment of all virtue and as a war tactician perfection itself, he was surprisingly realistic and unbiased in his descriptions and explanations of Austrian politics, domestic and foreign. Cuspinian's Kaiserbuch, as the historical expression of the political ideas of Maximilian, treats the problems involved in maintaining the authority of the Kaiser and holding the Reich together politically. As a counterbalance to his glittering descriptions of valor in the Italian campaigns, he is candid about many of the unfortunate things happening in the rebellious Slavic areas of the Empire.

"... Maximilians Bedeutung für die humanistische Geschichtsschreibung liegt doch nicht darin beschlossen, dass er dieses oder jenes Werk veranlasst, dieser oder jener Bestrebung sich freundlich bezeigte hat. Wenn wir den älteren deutschen Humanismus zumeist in einer von Petrarca stammenden Weltschmerzstimmung fanden, die dem Ende der Zeiten zuzureilen
glaubte, und dann mit der Wende des Jahrhunderts einen fast plötzlichen Umschlag zu einem grenzenlosen Optimismus wahrnahmen, so knüpft sich diese Veränderung vor allem an die Person Maximilians. Er hat dem Humanismus, der so starke Neigungen zeigt, sich in antiquarischer Gelehrsamkeit zu vergraben oder in eine angeblich bessere Vergangenheit zu flüchten, erst recht eigentlich die Richtung auf die Gegenwart gegeben.\footnote{ibid., pp. 218-219.}

It was, however, precisely this concern for the present that made the Humanists largely irrelevant with the advent of the Reformation and consigned them to positions of minor importance by posterity. The Humanists remained incapable of understanding the profound changes breaking around them. We find knowledgable men like Erasmus agonizing over the excesses and effects of Luther's doctrine. Much Humanist historical endeavor was so dilettantish it had little value for those who came after and the more capable and serious Humanist historians such as Hohenanus seemed unable to find a way to perpetuate their work. When the German intellectual independence that the Humanists had been so influential in working for finally arrived, they were not prepared for it. The comfortable and exclusive societies they had so carefully built up were completely unsuited for keeping pace with the effects of this new independence within the Church structure and the secular society.
CHAPTER THREE
LANDSCAPE POETRY AND THE PROMOTION OF GERMAN VIRTUE

Much of the new cultural nationalism took the form of renewed interest in the physical beauty of the German landscape, pride in German invention, and admonition to the people to be more noble morally than the Latins to the south. The cities, and not the Church, increasingly became the centers of this new cultural consciousness. The Humanists began to think of the German-speaking territories as a Kultur-einheit.

In his Beschreibung der Flüsse Deutschlands, Felix Fl(e)ldler is typical of the Humanist's growing passion for things German:

Neckar

Es entspringt der Neckar unweit der ruhmreichen Donau, wo sich der Schwarzwald erhebt. . .
Dort wo der Herzog von Württemberg herrscht, durch-strömt er die Gegend, . . .39

Fleldler's poems are noteworthy for the care he takes to capitalize on the rulers and their history in addition to his lifelike description of the landscapes.

Spree

Wo der böhmische Wald entlegene Berge begrenzet.

und nach Schlesien sich hinzieht in eebenes Land,
sprudelt aus winziger Quelle die Spree mit hurtigen
Wassern, ... Hier, wo Markgraf Joachim grossartigen Sitz sich
erbaute,
steht, von kunstvoller Hand herrlich errichtet,
ein Schloss.
Dieses gleiche, so heisst's, dem Palast des mykenischen
Herrschers, ... 40

Peter Luder, coming at a time when the division be-
tween Northern and Southern Europe was not quite so deep, be-
trays a kind of wistfulness at being from a "barbarisches
Land," but feels that "Tugend" compensates for anything that
might be lacking because of the location of his birth.

Seine Abkunft

Mich erzeugte barbarisches Land, es war meine Mutter, ... Wer die Tugend besitzet, der gleicht den Himmlischen, aber
was wir selber nicht tun, das ist nicht unser Verdienst. 41

Sebastian Brant, in his charming poem praising German
genius connected with the invention of printing, seizes the
opportunity to disparage the Italians and deride the French.
Unlike Peter Luder, who earlier had only German "Tugend" to
cling to, Brant now considers German "Treue" and "Waffen" as
self-evident. The Germans are pious barbarians no longer.
They now can lay claim to bypassing their Latin teachers
intellectually.

40ibid., p. 147.
41ibid., p. 261.
An Herrn Johannes Bergmann von Olpe, über den Vorzug
der kürzlich von Deutschen erfundenen Drucker kunst;
ein Preislied von S. Brant

Was wür praktischer wohl, was besser und nützlicher, das sich
wünscht die geleherte Welt und der Studierenden Schar,
as das gepriesene Werk, das, jüngst erfunden, uns Zeichen
und Geschriebenes zugleich vielfach zu drucken gelehrt? ... Was den Weisen Griechen, den kundigen Welschen verborgen
blieb, das erfand das Genie Deutschlands: die neueste Kunst.
Sage mir, der du Italiens Boden bebauest: was hast du,
das mit gleichem Wert solcher Erfindung sich misst? ... 42

The poetry in honor of German cities also bears
witness to the development of feeling for the fatherland among
the Humanists. The beauty of the cities and their glorious
histories are described. Buschius wrote a poem in honor of
Köln in 1508 and Helius Eobanus Hessus his "Panegyricus auf
Nürnberg" in 1532. Hessus also wrote historical poetry ex-
tolling the greatness of the German past.

Many of the Humanists, in spite of their classical
orientation and use of Latin, began to interest themselves
in contemporary German culture and Volkshumor. These ideas
began to integrate themselves into their writings. Heinrich
Bebel, of Tübingen, became the first to make a collection of
German proverbs. He also "unternahm es, den schwäbischen
Volkwitz mit dieser neuclassischen Zootologie zu verschmelzen
und gab lateinische facetiae heraus, in denen neben den Aus-
fällen auf die Pfaffen und raffinirten Ständereien auch der
kerngesunde deutsche Volkshumor seinen Platz fand." 43 

42 ibid., pp. 17-19.
43 Wolfgang Menzel, Deutsche Dichtung von der ältesten
Schwänke became very popular and year after year they underwent reprintings. The collection included such items as "... de jure potandi, worin Anfänge deutscher Weinlieder vorkommen, die zum Theil verschollen sind z. B. 'Wir haben ein Schiff mit Wein geladen' worin auch die berühmtesten deutschen Biere aufgezählt werden... Hans Plumsack, ein sehr rohes Gespräch..." 44

One of the chief burdens of the Humanists was the unseemly coarseness and drunkenness of the German people. This theme, Grobian, appears over and over again in their writings. Nicodemus Frischlin even goes so far as to say that Germans can rule the world once they put aside their penchant for strong drink and loose morals:

Gegen die Trunksucht, an Joh. Posthius

Alles besiegt dann der Deutsche, was nur die Sonne erblicket, alle Völker der Welt, auch Antipoden zuhauf.
Wenn er zuerst dich, Bacchus, besiegt und von sich verstossen, was ihm Unseliges bringt Trunksucht, von Fürien erzeugt. 45

Jakob Wimpfelting, in his Wegweiser für die deutsche Jugend and Adolescentia, wrote at length to the German youth concerning the necessity of purity in moral questions. His admonition covers all the aspects of education and personal conduct. Not only does he recommend absolute obedience to parents, Kaiser, and Church but deplores the bad image the

44 ibid.
45 Schnur, ed., trans., p. 177.
Germans create for themselves by eating and drinking to excess. "Eine Schande für das Jünglingsalter ist besonders Üppigkeit und Schwelgerei. Wein im Übermaß genossen ist ein böses Ding, und Unmäßigkeit im Essen lässt den Menschen 'mit Schwein und Esel' verwandt erscheinen. Der Mensch hat nur sehr wenig zu seinem Unterhalte nötig, er bleibt an Leib und Seele gesund, wenn er mässig ist. 'Es gewöhne sich deshalb der deutsche Jüngling daran, Speise und Trank recht mässig zu genießen, damit er nicht etwa mit vollem Rechte das Wort der Ausländer verdient, die ihrer eigenen noch größeren Fehler uneingedenk, fälschlich behaupten, alle Deutschen litten an dem Übel des Weinrausches und der Trunkenheit.'"46

Wimpfeling did not confine himself wholly to generalities, but also offers his advice on many aspects of personal grooming. He was upset about the unorthodox hair-styles of his day. "Ein widerwärtige Sitte der Jüngling ist das Kräuseln der Haare; zierlich und ordentlich soll allerdings der junge Mann sein, aber eine Schande ist es, dass 'Jünglinge die Haare, welche die Natur glatt, gerade und schön in der Farbe hat wachsen lassen, nicht nur rollen und kräuseln, sondern sie auch mit falschen Farben tränken und färben.'"47

Wimpfeling was not only concerned about the morals

47 ibid.
of youth and the German people in general, but also admonishes the leaders and princes of the nation. He is especially concerned about the moral abuses by men of the cloth and in his book *De integritate* (Über die Sittenreinheit) he makes some suggestions for priests faced with this problem.

"Die Mittel, die er dem angehenden Theologen zur Beobachtung fleckenloser Keuschheit an die Hand giebt, decken sich vielfach mit seinen Ratschlägen in der 'Jugend.' Auch hier ist ihm ein Hauptmittel Schulung des Geistes, also Pflege der Wissenschaft, überhaupt angestrengtes Arbeiten. Daneben empfiehlt er mit besonderem Nachdrucke das andächtige Gebet und die ständige Aufmerksamkeit auf sich selbst; in Versuchungen soll der junge Priester an die Wunden Christi, an die heilige Jungfrau, an die Schönheit der Tugend denken und sich besonders auch die schrecklichen Folgen des Lasters für Körper und Geist vor die Seele stellen; er nehme sich vor jeder Todsünde grundsätzlich in acht und fliehe namentlich die böse Gesellschaft."48

Concerning the ruling class in their influential positions of trust, Wimpfeling calls for a more conscientious attitude, especially with relation to the people they rule and the example they set. "Wichtig für die soziale Wohlfahrt des Volkes ist es dann auch, dass der Fürst nicht nach willkürlichen Ermess das Land mit Abgaben und Steuern belastet.

48 *ibid.*, p. 135.
Das Volk soll nicht mit seinem Beutel dafür büßen, wenn der Fürst seine noblen Passionen hat, wenn er ganze Summe ausgibt für Pferde und Günstlinge, für Jagd und Vogelsang, für Schmausereien und Palastbauten; ein rücksichtsvoller Fürst erspart dem Volke auch den Verdruss, die Schönen Saatfelder von den Hufen der Pferde bei der Jagd zerstampft zu sehen. . . . Freundliche Milde, Freigeibigkeit und gewinnende Herablassung, gepaart mit strenger Gerechtigkeit, vollenden das Idealbild des guten Fürsten nach der Seite seines sittlichen Charakters hin. . . . Der gute Fürst wird nur durchaus zuverlässige, gerechte, nächtberne und erfahrene Männer an seinen Hof ziehen, nur solche, die Gott fürchte, die, fern von Schmeichelei und häßlicher Liebedienerei, ihre Meinung geradeheraus sagen, gleichviel, ob sie ihrem Herrn damit eine Freude machen oder nicht. . . . Überhaupt sei in jeder Beziehung der Fürst auf sittlichem Gebiete für sein Volk Muster und Vorbild, das ist das beste Unterpfand für das Glück des fürstlichen Hauses und des Staates."

Wimpfeling illustrates so well the strange paradox the Humanists gradually found themselves in. He was one of the most active and vociferous spokesmen for the two incompatible doctrines of absolute obedience to the Church with all its Latin influence and the new German national awareness and soul-searching. He denounced the Swiss for solidifying their federation but never ceased urging the Germans to

49 ibid., pp. 116-117.
rediscover their culture because of its superiority over the
circumcision of French and Italian influences. He urged a German
moral renewal, probably himself unaware that he was thereby
subtly casting a reflection on the contemporary mode of living
so heavily influenced by the very Church he loved.

Only a few of the Humanists, Hutten being the most
notable, went so far as to advocate military means to sepa¬
rate Germany from Rome. Nathan Chytrius alludes to the lack
of military fervor but intimates that debauchery is the
greatest factor in the demise of German influence and vitality.

Germania entartet

Doch sie ergibt sich indessen der Wollust, dem Saufen und
Fressen,

dass damit sie recht brav durchbringe, was sie noch nat.
Waterland, ach! Welch erbärmlich Gesicht, du Arme! Und

50

51

wird es

wohl Medizin, die solch schlaffe Vergreisung dir nimmt?

In this Elegie Georg Sabinus laments the lack of the
spirit of war in the Reich, not with the view of separating
Germany from Rome, but to heighten her prestige within the
system and in the service of the Church.

Elegie 12. An Deutschland

Wohin, Germania, ist deine Kriegestugend entflohen, . . .
Bis nach Jerusalem hast du dein Banner siegreich getragen, . . .
Edle Germania, . . .
schätze im Kampfe den Ruhm, welcher das Reich einst
geziert, . . .

50 Schnur, ed., trans., p. 59.

51 ibid., p. 357.
Thus the Humanists, with their influence over the educated elite of the time, began and, in many ways, led the inexorable tide of events that eventually bypassed the Humanists themselves and rendered their conception of the new Germania and their own place in its structure irrelevant.
CONCLUSION

Humanism, and all its endeavor, was carried on within the self-contradictory context of remaking and participating in, not destroying, the society of the Middle Ages through innocent revitalization, and at the same time, functioning as a vanguard for the new order to come. Despite their extravagant claims and their renewed and deeply felt interest in the fatherland, we find the Humanists perpetuating written and spoken Latin, thus conservatively and, in many ways, negatively influencing German letters and thought for two centuries to come. On the other hand, again through the use of Latin, they encouraged the individual reevaluation of Church dogma, meddling to such an extent that they profoundly influenced the future course of Germany and the world.

We also find the Humanists indulging in inflammatory nationalism. Although much of this activity played a tremendous role in the upheavals to come, the Humanists were merely using patriotism to enhance their own standing as they played the international Humanist game. The German Humanists raced with the French and Italian Humanists for intellectual prestige. Their writings reached only a limited number of people and to be sure, were directed at only a select few. The extravagant historical claims of the German Humanists were not conceived by them as a profound nationalistic reawakening on the part of Germany in general, but was merely
a naive overcompensation on the part of the Humanist elite for lack of historical glory such as the Italians had in the Roman Empire. We even find Kaiser Maximilian "fixing" history in the attempt to outdo his rivals and enhance his own personal prestige.

As part of the transition from Middle Age universalism to the fragmentation of the Renaissance and Reformation, Humanism was buffeted by the two extremes. The two major concerns of the German Humanists, romantic cultural nationalism and religious enlightenment, were both of tremendous importance to the Reformation movement itself. Still, the Humanists attempted to reform the Middle Age system from within and had no intention of destroying the entire fabric of the society within which they had established themselves. The Humanists harbored a genuine desire to revitalize contemporary society, but only on their own terms. As a group, they did not realize the impact their activities tended to have and were bewildered as the Reformation began surging around them. They were horrified when some of the consequences, such as the Peasant's War, became apparent, for as an elite society the Humanists were still fundamentally part of the Middle Ages. With their optimism and naive hope for a new and enlightened era, the Humanists looked forward to the best of both worlds but were subsequently destroyed by both.
LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED


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