

MARCUS LIDDELL graduated in 2014 with a degree in German, having minored in ESS and Peace Studies. As a freshman, he began work in the Rare Books collection at the Hesburgh Library cataloguing a set of emergency currency notes. While working, he slowly began to notice a set of themes present across many different notes, which with encouragement from his undergraduate advisor Denise DellaRossa and ample support from his thesis advisor Tobias Boes he was able to organize into a thesis. He would like to thank them for their contributions, to thank the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections for the help they provided along the way, and to thank the Nanovic Institute for conference presentation travel funding. Marcus is currently in Greifswald, Germany on a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship.

# THE PERSISTENT PAST: NOTGELD AND PROTO-FASCIST SENTIMENTS IN ANTEBELLUM GERMANY

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## **Part 1: Introduction**

The rise of Nazism in Germany and the resulting Second World War have become etched into the culture and consciousness of the western world. This phenomenon has become the subject of a large body of scholarly research, the ultimate cautionary tale in the realm of politics, and a target of lingering obsession among the general public. Interest in the origins of the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP), both academic and general, frequently centers around one particular question: how did this happen? Implicit in that inquiry is another: how can we prevent this from happening again?

A number of answers have been offered in response to this question. Some have focused on the effectiveness of the Nazi Party in mobilizing their constituents and out-strategizing their political opponents, laying the credit and blame for the horrors that came next squarely on the shoulders of Adolf Hitler and his compatriots, and attributing the party's ideology solely to them. More careful analyses of Germany in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, have revealed an existing undercurrent of support for the ideas and ideals espoused by the Nazis which helped them in their bid for power.

## 1.1 The *Völkisch* Movement and Nostalgia

Germany's late unification and rapid industrialization made it unique among European nations of the time in terms of the way its citizens thought of their unity.<sup>430</sup> Indeed, these processes left much room for interpretation regarding what made someone German, but as time passed one particular ideology would come to the forefront.

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the movement that would come to form the core of Nazi support was in full swing. Called the Heimatbewegung or the *völkisch* movement, it was not chiefly political in nature, at least initially, but rather ideological, bordering in some cases on mystical. Inspired by the Romantic movement of past generations, its adherents generally prized the countryside over the city and emphasized the unity and nature of the *deutsche Volk*, the German people. *Volk* was a concept that explained the common origins of the people considered to be true Germans, focused on their shared language and physical traits, particularly the idea of a shared "German blood," as evidence of their close connection, and espoused an ideal of community and shared set of values to which all Germans should strive.<sup>431</sup> These ideals are collectively espoused most succinctly in the distinction made between Civilization and Culture. Civilization was seen as the most basic form of the functioning society, and used by these groups chiefly as a pejorative term.<sup>432</sup> Civilizations were seen by the movement as societies that functioned, but possessed no Culture, Culture for them being a kind of collective soul based around the noble purpose of the German people, their native lands, and the individual's deep belonging, or "rootedness", to these.<sup>433</sup> In embracing Culture while rejecting Civilization, *völkisch* Germans sought the construction of a nationalistic pan-German society focused around ties to their native

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<sup>430</sup> Mary Fulbrook and Martin Swales, eds., *Representing the German nation: History and identity in twentieth-century Germany* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 21.

<sup>431</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), 16.

<sup>432</sup> Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, 6.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

land and their shared ethnic ancestry, which they saw as a preferable alternative to the materialism and alienation they suffered from under the new industrial standard.<sup>434</sup>

Whether a necessary development or not, the reality is that a good deal of the ideology promoted in this worldview came from looking to the cultural values of the past. *Völkisch* Germans played up their common heritage with discussions of their mutual history, the shared homelands with which they still felt a deep, spiritual connection, and stories of individual nobility and heroism which deliberately focused on the First and Second German Empires of the past as a way of rejecting any aspect of the present Germany as a possible source of inspiration.<sup>435</sup> Nostalgia for the medieval world, in particular, became bound up with the essential mysticism of the *völkisch* ideology, and led to a narrative of history through the eyes of the “noble German.” Reality was rejected in favor of epic, for the purpose of building a canon of Germanic heroes who could serve as models for present-day *völkisch* Germans trying to reach the heroic Germanic ideal.<sup>436</sup>

These groups were primarily, if not exclusively, composed of bourgeois Germans for whom the Industrial Revolution had meant a gradual loss of the status and wealth they had previously enjoyed, as the structure of society shifted.<sup>437</sup> In reaction, they romanticized the past, demonized materialism and those satisfied with the new industrialized Germany, and championed *völkisch* ideals as an alternative to both capitalism and communism.

## 1.2 The *Völkisch* Movement and Nonsynchronicity

This ideology was both partly explained and partly supported by the nature of German society during that time. Technology began to progress in leaps, but many European frames of mind had not caught up. Nowhere is this more evident than the battlefields of World War I, where technologies like the airplane, the machine gun, and heavy artillery met tactics that had

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid, 19-20.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid, 7.

not changed to accommodate these drastically new weapons. This led to periods of intense bloodshed followed by a lengthy war of attrition in which soldiers hunkered down in trenches and the strategies employed mostly devolved to a battle of will. This experience is explained by the concept of non-synchronism, the idea that the flow of change is not universal and uniform in its effect.<sup>438</sup> This concept describes modern wars with pre-modern tactics, and, similarly, modern industry with a pre-modern conception of a society. The Industrial Revolution was, like the machine gun, a new phenomenon for Germans at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and even those who did not cling to earlier ideals would certainly not have found them difficult to recall. The impetus for changing the conduct of war was simple: people were not faring well under the old tactics. Similarly, so long as people were faring better in an industrial Germany than they might have expected to before the advent of industry, they would in large part have changed their understanding to match their new surroundings. Once things began to go poorly, however, it was not the old German mindset but the new German reality that was seen as problematic, as I will show in the following chapter. Though I use the term nostalgia to describe this phenomenon, it is not entirely correct to say that Germans were looking back to their past; in many respects, a certain subculture of Germans was still living in the past, though the material world had advanced beyond them.

### **1.3 Introduction to Notgeld**

In Germany, chiefly during the period of high inflation running from the 1918 end of World War I to roughly 1923, an alternative to central bank currency existed. This “emergency money”, or Notgeld, was propped up, not by the government of the Weimar Republic, but by the collateral of the cities, companies and occasionally even individuals who issued it.<sup>439</sup> As a practical alternative to the sharply-spiraling Mark, Notgeld quickly proved its worthlessness;

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<sup>438</sup> Ernst Bloch, trans. Mark Ritter, “Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics,” *New German Critique*, 11 (1997): 22.

<sup>439</sup> Hans L. Grabowski & Manfred Mehl, *Deutsches Notgeld: Deutsche Serienscheine 1918 – 1922* (Regenstauf: H. Gietl Verlag & Publikationsservice GmbH, 2009), 15. See also: William Guttman & Patricia Meehan, *The Great Inflation: Germany 1919 - 23* (Westmead, Farnborough, Hants, England: Saxon House, D. C. Heath Ltd., 1975), 51.

most notes were accorded worth only in their particular areas of issue, and Notgeld was prone to falling out of circulation due to its ever-growing popularity among collectors.<sup>440</sup> That being the case, these notes quickly lost any of the exchange value they might have once seemed to possess.

Notgeld benefitted from another kind of value, however, which enabled its survival to the present day: that of a cultural artifact. The detailed and brightly-colored images found on most examples of Notgeld made them collector's items long after they had lost their exchange value. In fact, many of the series of colorful notes circulated from 1920 until 1922 were printed after Notgeld became almost exclusively an item for collection.<sup>441</sup> They were then sold by the cities, townships, companies, and individuals who had commissioned them, and there was stiff competition among producers of Notgeld to create the most popular—and most profitable—notes. Notes were also used as a means to shamelessly promote particular cities and regions in an effort to endear them to local buyers.

The surprising economic success of these small notes led to many attempts to falsify them, most commonly by back-printing them to make them appear older. Several of the more prolific producers of falsified Notgeld were eventually brought to trial in early 1922.<sup>442</sup> There is no evidence, however, that the accused were punished for their crimes, and at least one of the most prolific producers of falsified Notgeld was not brought to trial. The proliferation of forged Notgeld led to the disillusionment of collectors, and may have caused them to abandon their passion altogether, had the German government not forbidden the printing of Notgeld starting on July 17, 1922, and promised to punish anyone who disregarded the ban.<sup>443</sup> With the ban on new Notgeld, their collection became popular once again, despite the rising prices of necessary goods, which would spiral out of control by the end of that year<sup>444</sup>. Notgeld collections were maintained through that period and protected beyond the time of hyperinflation, and an astounding amount

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<sup>440</sup> Grabowski & Mehl, *Deutsches Notgeld*, 15.

<sup>441</sup> Here and following in paragraph: Grabowski & Mehl, *Deutsches Notgeld*, 15.

<sup>442</sup> Here and following in paragraph: Grabowski & Mehl, *Deutsches Notgeld*, 16.

<sup>443</sup> Grabowski & Mehl, *Deutsches Notgeld*, 17.

<sup>444</sup> Guttman & Meehan, *The Great Inflation*, x.

of Notgeld has survived to today.<sup>445</sup> These images were kept in the collections of private citizens, and eventually acquired by museums, libraries, and art galleries.

It is in this second source of worth that the real benefits of studying Notgeld can be seen. These images were presumably kept by people sympathetic to their depictions, since there could have been little hope of a renewal of their economic viability. Indeed, Notgeld continued to be printed and collected even after losing its monetary value, and it is largely these notes that are the most colorful and vivid in their depictions, since such images were the selling point. Considering that Notgeld was printed during the time of hyperinflation in Germany, when people were burning monetary notes as fuel, the survival of the notes suggests that the original owners agreed with the contained depictions. This stems from the fact that these notes were not tossed into the fire, but rather seem to have been in many cases quite deliberately preserved. It is further astounding to consider that most of the notes analyzed in the following pages were purchased purely for their cultural value during a period of high inflation, and that the cost of each note included an “administrative fee” which was added to the nominal value of the note.<sup>446</sup> That is to say, people were spending money on these notes at a time when money was especially scarce and becoming scarcer.

These notes may be said not only to reflect the minds of their collectors, but also the minds of their commissioners. It is unlikely, bordering on impossible, that these commissioners, who were a large collection of individual patrons, companies, and an extensive list of microcosmic political administrations (mainly those of individual cities but including some regional confederacies of cities as well), could have conspired to coordinate and direct the content and methods of depiction found on the printed notes; it is similarly unlikely that the printing companies would have been given the license by their patrons to do so. Furthermore, there is no available evidence to suggest a particular overarching political agenda on the part of either of these two contributors in the process of making Notgeld. For that reason, this analysis proceeds under the assumption that the depicted notes reflect an array of world-views and

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<sup>445</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>446</sup> Grabowski & Mehl, *Deutsches Notgeld*, 17.

sentiments representative of prevalent ideological trends; if not in German culture generally, then in a particular subculture within the Germany of the Weimar Republic.

Cities, banks, and credit unions appear to have produced more Notgeld notes than other private companies or individual citizens, so the priorities and decisions of bureaucrats and elected officials may be unconsciously overrepresented in Notgeld imagery. The fact that the notes studied here were not just printed but also saved, mostly in the collections of private citizens, may serve to mitigate that potential bias. If so, the notes should perhaps best be understood as a reflection of a popular ideology in German culture. If not, if images chosen by government officials and bankers are indeed overrepresented in Notgeld, it is perhaps even more striking, since ostensibly these are two of the classes of people who gained the most from the new state of affairs. For the government officials, the recently established democracy of the Weimar Republic made their office possible, at least in its current form, and for the bankers the emphasis on free market capitalism had come part and parcel with the Industrial Revolution. It seems surprising that either of those groups might be inclined to give up their gains from the developments of modernity in Germany.

#### **1.4 Depictions in Notgeld**

In fact, the images on Notgeld vary widely, although some themes persist in both the most blatant and more subliminal imagery contained within these notes. Notgeld may depict recurring celebrations, commemorate events of the past, showcase a local or national figure, tell a story, display buildings, or honor a location in nature, among many other things.<sup>447</sup> None of the aforementioned images appears in every Notgeld note. Indeed, there appear to be no explicit universal themes, exactly as one might reasonably expect from currency notes which had such a diverse collection of authors and purposes. No visual element exists in Notgeld which a casual observer could point out in every note. This is undoubtedly a product of the many different patrons of Notgeld, as well as the utter absence of formal guidelines.

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<sup>447</sup> For a more complete understanding of the various images displayed by Notgeld, see: Grabowski & Mehl, *Deutsches Notgeld*.



It is precisely this diversity of imagery which makes the common threads in these notes striking. As previously stated, there is nothing that all Notgeld depicts. There are, however, some things that are frequently depicted, and others which, when they are depicted, are nearly always depicted in the same way. These images had permeated the consciousness of the society, despite the fact that they could not be used as currency for much of the time they were printed, and that they existed during a time when actual currency was frequently burned in lieu of firewood. Several Notgeld images are striking, but it is the underlying themes of these notes, often apparent only under careful analysis, that truly communicate the current of thought behind the production and collection of Notgeld.

Though Notgeld has been largely overlooked in academic circles, some research on the notes' depictions and their relation to particular cultural trends and propagandistic elements in certain German groups in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has been conducted, particularly in relation to later notes' depictions of Jews.<sup>448</sup> Despite this, thus far there does not appear to have been an attempt to unify any of the myriad depictions offered by Notgeld into an overarching cultural message. At first glance, this may seem logical, considering the range of patrons attached to Notgeld notes. However, there is evidence that such an overarching message is present in several of the images depicted on Notgeld, and that this message endorses the ideology of *völkisch* Germans.

### 1.5 Notgeld and *Völkisch* Ideology

*Völkisch* Germans played up their shared heritage with discussions of their common history, the homelands with which they still felt a deep, spiritual connection, a shared militaristic pride, and, later, the nearly universal hardship of the post-World War I economic crisis. Each of these themes is evident in the body of Notgeld notes, and each is supported by notes from several different sources. In the following chapters, I intend to show that Notgeld reacted to contemporary economic turmoil by blaming the Treaty of Versailles and its alleged consequences

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<sup>448</sup> See: Sonja M. Hedgepeth, "The Palimpsestic Identity: Residual Discourse on Jews Exemplified by German Notgeld," *Evolving Jewish Identities in German Culture: Borders and Crossings* (2000): 23-44.

for creating a weak Germany, while at the same time spreading a message of future German resurgence based on a focus on the glorious past. I will further argue that Notgeld both reflected and spread *völkisch* ideals of the history of the German people and the German warrior, ideals both nostalgic and non-synchronous in nature. Hence a focus on the past was less part of a desire to return to simpler times and more part of a resistance to the sweeping changes to the old order that were occurring across Europe, but especially in Germany at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I will close with the contributions of this research to the understanding of *völkisch* culture among the consumers and commissioners of Notgeld in the Weimar Republic, including a brief treatment of the place of the Nazi party in these developments and the role that the cultural mindset of middle-class Germans and bureaucrats – the major consumers and commissioners of Notgeld, respectively – played in the rise of the Nazi party, in contrast to German intellectuals and members of the bourgeois upper class.

## **Part 2: Notgeld and Not**

It is no secret that Germany saw a lot of change after the end of World War I, much of it negative. Reparations payments to the victorious allied forces, most notably the French, the division and occupation of parts of the former German Empire, the sudden change of government from imperial state to Weimar Republic, and the disarmament of the military were all significant changes with consequences for the young state. However, in the years following the Great War, Germans did not chiefly turn their attention to any of these changes, but rather, to a phenomenon which had been growing in the background throughout the war, and became a more obvious and dire problem in the years following: inflation. Inflation was high in Germany in the years after the war and continued to outpace that of other countries well into the 1920s. In the summer of 1923 Germany would enter a period known as hyperinflation, and by November of that year, a pair of shoes would cost 32 trillion marks.<sup>449</sup> Many of these problems were still on the horizon during the Notgeld's peak years, which interestingly seem to have ended at approximately the same time that hyperinflation began in Weimar Germany, but the problem of

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<sup>449</sup> Guttman & Meehan, *The Great Inflation*, 62.

money was foremost in the minds of many of the organizations and people who commissioned Notgeld.

Many notes present some form of commentary on the economic crisis they were intended to relieve; though much of the commentary centers around the folk wisdom of saving money so one will have extra to spend in an emergency, a significant number of notes also seek to answer the question of why Notgeld exists. In other words, they try to answer why Germany was experiencing such fiscal hardship. The answer they give lays unilateral blame on the Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I and with it the second German Empire. The Treaty of Versailles is chiefly given the blame for two major events: the economic crisis in Germany, and the loss of formerly German territory.

## 2.1 Self-Reference in Notgeld

Before continuing to explicate this message as it is present in Notgeld, it may be sensible to work out the degree to which Notgeld can be said to be self-aware of its role as emergency currency. To some extent, this may already be apparent, since Notgeld was produced by organizations and individuals who were themselves embroiled in this fiscal crisis. However, Notgeld was printed and collected for a significant portion of its history not as a functional currency, but as a cultural artifact to be collected.<sup>450</sup> It may be reasonable to believe that the average collector of Notgeld would have been familiar with the monetary function it bore only a few years earlier, but it is interesting to see how the creators of Notgeld envisioned the role and origins of the notes. One such understanding is evident in a collection of notes from Kitzingen am Main. This series of six notes traces a story, written in the form of a poem, in which townspeople note a dearth of cash in the area and the city council begins to print Notgeld as a way to relieve the cash crunch.

Figure 1: A six-part series of Notgeld notes from Kitzingen, issued in 1921. Only the backs are displayed.



This self-referential Notgeld emphasizes the didactic nature of the notes, which in this case praise the municipal council for their decision to print Notgeld. Notes were seen as media for cultural teachings, whatever the subject, and were used as a means for their issuers to practice praise or criticism as they desired. This was the case not only for events and people of the past, but for the present as well.

## 2.2 Notgeld, Need and the Treaty of Versailles

A series of notes from the city of Kahla portrays perhaps the most striking indictment against the Treaty of Versailles. Every note in the series bears the same image on the front: a man in profile, wearing a blue shirt, with one clenched fist visible. Behind him lies a partially-completed wall of bricks, and on the left-hand side of the note some text is visible.



Figure 2: The front of a note from Kahla, issued in 1921

The note reads “Was das Schicksal uns zerbrach, neu erstehe nach und nach. Traget Steine zu dem Bau, deutscher Mann und deutsche Frau”. In English, “What fortune shattered for me and

you, purchase bit by bit anew. Carry stones to the construction, German man and German woman”.<sup>451</sup> This quote is attributed to one J. A. Himner from Augsburg.

Before delving into the exhortation of the text, it is interesting to note that the location of the quote’s author is mentioned. It would not be surprising if the author were from Kahla; the propensity of Notgeld to praise its city of origin has already been noted in the introduction to this paper. Even an author from the surrounding area might not seem strange. However, Kahla lies in Thuringia, while Augsburg is over 150 miles away, in Bavaria. Hence, local pride cannot be cited as a reason for including the location of the quote’s author. Two possibilities seem most likely: either the city name was included because the author was relatively unknown, or it was included as a gesture of German solidarity in crisis. Certainly it evinces such a solidarity, since the words of an author in southern Bavaria were relevant enough to the people of Kahla to appear on their local emergency currency, and it seems likely that this nod to unity was intentional. The text itself lends more support to that idea, with its exhortation to “German man and German woman” to work together in rebuilding the Germany that fortune destroyed. It is also noteworthy that the chosen quote does not seek to energize Germans about the possibilities opened up by a future unconstrained by many of the social and political structures of the past, or advise them to accept the recent changes to their world and work for a better future, but rather directly challenges the reader to work to rebuild those old structures, to make the future like the past. Taken alone, this fits, if loosely, into the broader *völkisch* message contained in Notgeld, but these notes bear a variety of images on the back, which offer further support for the non-synchronism and nostalgia found across cities and subjects on Notgeld notes.

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<sup>451</sup> This translation of the text is my own, and I have made two decisions which are noteworthy for the purpose of this paper. First, “das Schicksal” can be translated as “fate”, “destiny”, or “fortune”, so the connotation of chance offered by the word “fortune”, while in this case likely intended, is not the only way the text can be read. Second, the verb “erstehen” can mean “to purchase” or “to arise”, both of which would fit in this context. I chose to translate it as “to purchase” for the play on Notgeld it indicates, but it would also have been understood as having the other meaning, which fits more snugly with the metaphor of construction.

### 2.2.1 Economic Problems in Germany

On one of the notes in the set from Kahla, one can clearly see three charts giving the prices of milk, butter and eggs (respectively, starting from the top of the note and moving down) on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1921. These notes were issued on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1921, so there is no reason to believe that these prices are incorrect.



Figure 3: The back of a note from Kahla, issued in 1921. The image on the front of this note is depicted in Figure 2.

The graphs show a dramatic difference in the price of eggs, milk and butter among the cities listed. Given the hyperinflation of the period, one can presume that the prices are universally high. This image by itself presents a fairly neutral portrayal of the economic woe in Germany, and its goal could only reasonably be the potential reduction of prices in high-inflation cities to the levels of low-inflation cities, which is in keeping with the exhortation of the quote on the front of the note. The intent of the notes' commissioners becomes clearer, however, upon viewing the other notes in the series.



Figure 4: The back of a note from Kahla, issued in 1921. The image on the front of this note is depicted in Figure 2.

A second note bears an image of child mortality rates among German children between one and five years old in the years 1913-1918. Two distinct jumps in the aggregate rates are evident: one in 1915, and another in 1918. This note is different from the others in the series in that it deals with the intervening years between 1913 and 1918, which are not shown in any of the other charts or graphs. The trends in evidence on this note's graph show a strong jump in mortality rates, especially in 1918, the last year of the First World War. The worth of bank notes from several foreign countries in Berlin as compared to parity (with parity occurring at 100 on the graph) is depicted on another note from the same series, where a full thirteen Western countries are shown to have bank notes of a higher worth than the German Mark, twelve of them having currency valued at more than double that of the Mark. There is also a note which depicts





By far the highest percentage depicted is in the area of “spending for the implementation of the Treaty of Versailles,” with the largest percentage of that going to the cost of keeping occupation troops in Germany. The percentage of funding going to the implementation of the Treaty is underlined twice, setting it off from the rest of the text on the note, which is in many parts barely legible. With that portion of the chart aggregated as it is and given such a vague title, it is impossible to tell what is being counted as “spending for the implementation of the Treaty of Versailles,” and it is entirely possible that costs are included in the figure which are only marginally related to the implementation of the Treaty’s provisions. In any case, the note’s transmission of factual information takes, at best, a secondary role, behind its use as propaganda. The clear primary purpose is to inflame people against the Treaty of Versailles, and the consequent presence of foreign troops in Germany. Coupled with the exhortation from the front of the note for Germans to build back what they had lost, this seems to be a clear reference to prewar—meaning Imperial—Germany. This note, more explicitly than those preceding, reminds Germans of the empire they lost and makes an argument for its renewal which is not merely cultural, but economic in nature.

### **2.2.2 The Loss of German Land**

The Treaty of Versailles was not only attacked for its perceived effects on the German economy, however. It also drew the ire of Notgeld commissioners for its more immediate effects on Germany, chief among them the loss of German territory. This is hinted at both indirectly, through the loss of land-based industry, and directly, in the aforementioned series of notes from Kahla. One of the Kahla notes depicts information about the state railway system. A graphic which takes up almost the entire lower half of the note shows the trends that the entire note seeks to illustrate; the rail system continued to grow from its first six kilometers in 1835 up until 1913, the year before the outbreak of World War I. In later measured years – 1920 in particular – there is evidence of a decline in total track length and the number of train cars which frequent the rails.



Figure 6: The back of a note from Kahla, issued in 1921. The image on the front of this note is depicted in Figure 2.

The use of the year 1913 can only be meant to indicate the state of the rail system before the outbreak of war, and the failure to mention data for any years during the war shows a focus not on the damage dealt by World War I itself, but on the perceived role played by the Treaty of Versailles in handicapping the German railways. The actual effect cannot be determined without data from the years of the war itself, but the intent to reference the results of the Treaty is clear, especially when this image is considered in concert with the other side of the note and the other notes in the series.

Another note displays a chart showing the loss of German land to other nations due to the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. Two graphs are depicted on this note. The larger one is triangular and divided into four pieces. In the area at the base of the triangle, the figure “77%”

has been printed, and writing on the left and right, respectively, clarifies that this figure represents the percentage of citizens in the old German Empire who remain citizens in German territory, and the number of people who make up that percentage. Percentages and clarification are also given for the former citizens of the Empire in the occupied territories along the Rhein (10%), the “Abstimmungsgebiet” (4%), and the area surrendered by Germany and divided among other nations (9%). A second graph shows the proportion of formerly German lands which went to—in order from the recipients of the most land to the least—Poland, France, Denmark, the League of Nations, Danzig, Belgium, and Czechoslovakia<sup>452</sup>.

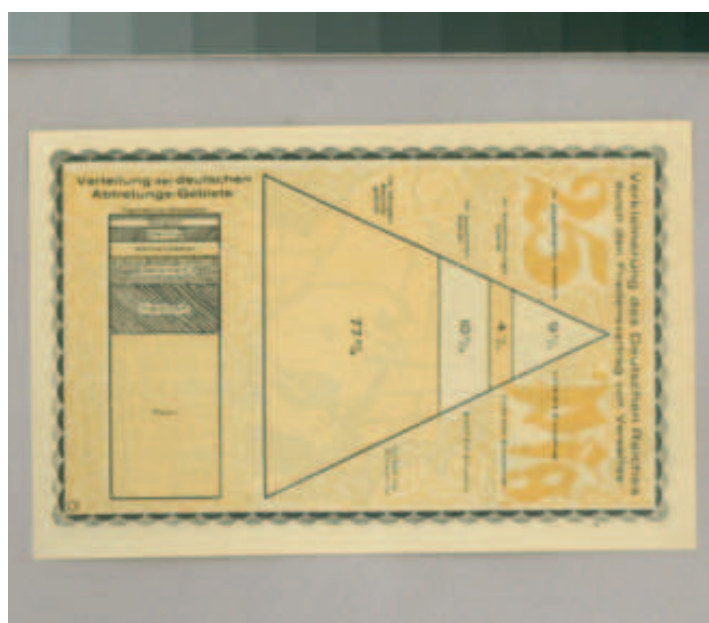


Figure 7: The back of a note from Kahla, issued in 1921. The image on the front of this note is depicted in Figure 2.

The reacquisition of these areas would become a major political goal of Adolf Hitler in the years leading up to World War II, and this note suggests that, for at least some Germans, the desire to reintegrate those territories into Germany was strong early on. Also apparent is that the makers of this note were not merely interested in winning the land back for the current German state, but

<sup>452</sup> On the note, the portion of territory lost to administration of the League of Nations is denoted as the “Memel-Gebiet”. Known in English as the Memel Territory or alternately the Klaipėda Region, this region in present-day Lithuania was administered collectively by the League of Nations, with the understanding that the population would one day be able to vote on whether or not to rejoin Germany. In fact, the Memel Territory was forcibly occupied and annexed by Lithuania in 1923.

thought of the territory in terms of the old Empire. This is made clear by the use of the word “Reich”, which occurs twice on the note. The main title of the larger graph is “Verkleinerung des Deutschen Reiches”, and the clarification on the left-hand side of the graph referring to the base of the triangle notes that it refers to the percentage of Germans “im übrigen Reichsgebiet” – that is, in Germany’s current area. It does not denote citizens of the Weimar Republic, but rather of a shrunken present-day Germany, offering the statistics in terms which force a constant focus on the German Empire of the past. This is yet another nostalgic reference to the German Empire as it was before the Treaty of Versailles. Like the note about the rail system, this note bemoans Germany’s concrete losses due to the Treaty of Versailles. The exhortation on the front of the notes change the message subtly, however. This is not merely a case of Notgeld mourning over losses: it is also an admonition to work to win back what has been lost, and serves to the present-day viewer as eerie foreshadowing of the early political goals of the Nazi regime.

Evidence of a belief that Germany would rise again appears in a different way on another note from Kahla, from a different series than the aforementioned Notgeld notes. This note displays a tree shedding rectangular paper like leaves, almost certainly either Notgeld or, more likely, the Central Bank currency that was quickly losing its worth in the last months of 1921. This gloomy metaphor for the contemporary situation is juxtaposed with an image on the back depicting “Sylvesternacht 1921-1922” and titling the image “Deutscher Spuk in Paris”, translated as “German Spook in Paris.”<sup>453</sup> The note displays a skeleton wearing a pair of trousers with a single strap to hold them up and a hat, and carrying a bucket of paint. The skeleton is standing at a signpost in Paris, with the Eiffel Tower in the background, and the color scheme tells of a late night, perhaps midnight on New Year’s Eve, between the years 1921 and 1922. The “spook” has written two words on the signpost, and is finishing a third.

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<sup>453</sup> My translation.



Figure 8: The front (left) and back (right) of a note from Kahla, issued in 1921.

The words are “Mene Tekel Utarsin”, a quote from a story in the Book of Daniel.<sup>454</sup> In the story, popularly called the story of the Writing on the Wall, a disembodied hand writes the words “Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin” on a wall of the throne room of King Balshazzar of Babylon. His slave Daniel is sent for to decipher the words. Daniel declares, interestingly, that they are currency terms with a hidden meaning when taken together, and that they mean Balshazzar has been counted, weighed, and found wanting, and that his kingdom will be divided in two. That very night, according to the story, Balshazzar is killed and Babylon is divided between the Persian Empire and the Medes. The allusion made to that story in this note is a powerful one. The German spook is telling the French that the writing is on the wall, and that they may soon be going the way of Babylon. This is a powerful and surprising claim to make, since it amounts to

<sup>454</sup> Here and following: Dan. 5:1-31 KJV. The discrepancy between the words “Utarsin” and “Upharsin” might be accounted for by small spelling differences in translations of the Book of Daniel, the actual word having been written in Hebrew. The quote is nevertheless not entirely accurate, but it serves the purpose of referencing the story.

an aggressive assertion of Germany's re-emergence as a power at the expense of France, perhaps through a mechanism similar to that by which Germany united into one nation fifty years ago. The blame leveled at France for Germany's economic situation is nowhere more clearly apparent in Notgeld than in this image, and nowhere is faith in Germany's potential to reassert itself as a world power through conquest more powerfully alluded to.

### **2.3 Part 2 Conclusion**

The aforementioned notes hint at a desire for the rebirth of Germany through the old order of Imperial Germany and make at times fairly explicit references to Germany's perceived slights under the Treaty of Versailles, with special focus occasionally directed at the role of the French in setting up and enforcing that agreement. They provide the notion of a German unity of suffering to couple with their supposedly common history and values. The ideals of the völkisch German movement are evident across many cities in Germany, and when they appear in Notgeld, they appear with remarkably little variation on their themes. Völkisch Germans sought a cultural return to the glory of the old imperial order as a panacea for the economic and political turmoil of their situation. They looked to the past with nostalgia, but with the intent of bringing it into the future too, and in that sense they can be seen as deliberately nonsynchronous. In this look to the past, they started with their militaristic roots.

### **Part 3: Notgeld and the Conquest of Rome**

In the year AD 9, the military of the Roman Empire suffered one of the worst defeats in its history. Quintilius Varus led three of Rome's twenty-eight legions of troops into modern-day Germany to quell a tribal rebellion in the north. Varus had been appointed to governorship of the new territory east of the Rhine and north of the Danube, a position which might have been firmly

established upon his victorious return but for the actions of a particularly daring commander and his confederacy of Germanic tribes.<sup>455</sup>

This commander, Arminius, was a privileged member of the Cherusci tribe who had fought for Rome in previous campaigns and was, by all accounts, familiar with their battle tactics, their strengths, and their weaknesses.<sup>456</sup> He was also an apparently charismatic leader who succeeded in gathering and commanding a force composed of soldiers from several different Germanic tribes, and one who sought to halt the Roman incursion into his tribe's land. Beyond that, very little is known about him.

Arminius likely knew that trying to face the Roman forces in open combat was foolish; they had proven their organization, discipline, and technological superiority time and again in conflict with the more individualistic Germanic tribes. Instead, Arminius set an ambush for the Romans at a place where he knew the legions would be forced to march in much closer quarters than those to which they were accustomed.<sup>457</sup> There he waited with his coalition of Germanic tribes for Quintilius Varus and his three legions.

The Romans walked blindly into the trap Arminius had set.<sup>458</sup> When he sounded the command, the confederation of Germanic soldiers attacked. The Romans, too close together to swing their swords with much force and unable to regroup in the tight space or send riders along the column to stop the press from behind, were slaughtered. Discipline failed, and the survivors broke ranks and fled, many to be run down by tribal confederates or captured as slaves. Varus, disgraced and watching his force disintegrate around him, committed suicide by falling on his sword. The few Romans who escaped made it back to bases along the Rhine, which were subsequently strengthened and maintained as the border of the Empire.

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<sup>455</sup> Peter S. Wells, *The Battle That Stopped Rome: Emperor Augustus, Arminius, and the Slaughter of the Legions in the Teutoburg Forest* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 83.

<sup>456</sup> Wells, *The Battle That Stopped Rome*, 105.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid*, 163.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid*, 169.

Augustus and the official Roman accounts of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, as it was named in Roman annals, largely blamed Quintilius Varus for the spectacular failure.<sup>459</sup> Even so, the three numbers associated with the destroyed legions were never used to designate new legions, and with the exception of a punitive campaign undertaken under the command of Germanicus in the following years never made another military venture north of the Danube or east of the Rhine.<sup>460</sup> Arminius, for his part, aspired to a kingship in his own lands, and was killed for his ambitions years later by members of his own tribe who wished to retain their comparatively democratic political society.<sup>461</sup>

The information available to scholars regarding the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest comes almost exclusively from two sources: Roman accounts of the battle, many published years or even centuries after it took place, and more recent archeological digs. It is either the case that Germanic tribes in the area at that time did not make written records, or none have survived. Germans in the years following the First World War would not have had access to much of the archeological information, and so would not have thought of Kalkriese Hill, today the most likely location of the battle, or any other equally specific location when they thought of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest. Instead, they would have thought of the Teutoburg Forest itself, which archeologists now believe to be located several dozen miles north of the actual battlefield.<sup>462</sup> The rest of the information about Arminius's legendary defeat of Rome, however, would have been equally available to those who could read Latin, and the story became important to movements of nationalism in Germany in the nineteenth century.

Notgeld depictions of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest employ two particular concepts in both imagery and text: that of the unified group and that of the powerful individual leader. These concepts are employed to make the case for a long tradition of imperialistic power in Germany and to argue for a return to those ideals and that structure. They utilize nostalgia for the

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<sup>459</sup> Ibid, 202.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid, 35.



fictional Germany of the distant past and its military prowess, as well as a non-synchronous undercurrent of admiration for the Roman model of imperial power.

### 3.1 Imagery and Style

As with the notes discussed elsewhere, elements of the depictions studied here hint at the overarching purpose behind the notes. In particular, the level of detail used in depictions of groups and individuals and the portrayal of single people in contrast with that of groups highlight the value placed on both particular figures within the story and the concept of the individual in general.



Figure 9: Back of a note from Horn (Lippe) and Detmold, issued in 1921.

The level of detail applied to single figures in contrast to groups is perhaps the most striking indicator of the valuation of the individual in these notes. This is apparent in a note from Horn (Lippe), which depicts a lone cavalry soldier of the Roman army with a soldier who seems to serve as a kind of trumpeter, a lone Germanic warrior, and a more distant horde of Roman foot soldiers. This last group is indistinct to the point that the figures even in the first row are barely discernible from one another, and beyond them are only humanoid blobs. In the foreground, the

size and level of detail offered to the three individual characters separate them clearly into camps of important figures and unimportant figures. The trumpeter belongs to this latter camp. He is placed behind the horse, on the far side of the image, and his body is almost lost in the army behind him. At first glance, it may not even be apparent that a figure stands there. The Roman horseman and his Germanic adversary, by contrast, are positioned against a uniform background. Indeed, despite the fact that the title, Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, might reasonably indicate the presence of a good many trees, there is only one in the image, and both of the major figures are distinct from it. They are neither behind nor before it, but instead are positioned to either side, the lines of their figures untouched by any of the other shapes depicted. It is also worth noting that, although they stand in the same plane as the trumpeter, both of the other two individuals appear to be one or more heads taller than him.



Figure 10: Back of a note from Eisbergen, issued in 1921.

Individuals stand out within a group as well. On a note from Eisbergen, the actual violent clash between the Roman legions and Germanic confederacy is displayed. One figure is distinct, even conspicuous, in the image; that of Arminius, the Cherusci leader of the confederacy. Despite being in the middle ground of the image, he stands head and shoulders above both the German and Roman fighters, looking off into the distance and stretching out a sword towards the corner of the image, a pose which serves to make him appear even larger in contrast to the other human figures depicted. He is also notably the only Germanic soldier in armor, and he wears a

unique winged helmet which is consistently associated with him across images hailing from several different cities. He stands out in a sea of indistinct faces and limbs as the clear focus of the note's depiction.

Individuals, either portrayed alone or as focal points in groups, are everywhere evident in a series of Notgeld notes from Detmold, the present-day site of a memorial commemorating the victory in the Teutoburg Forest, and in the early twentieth century believed to border the forest where the famous battle took place. These notes are interesting for their style, which portrays all characters and other elements of the images as shadows on canvas, clearly outlined black silhouettes against a white backdrop. This is not a particularly rare feature for a series of Notgeld notes that tells a story.<sup>463</sup> It does, however, serve to make all characters less distinguishable from one another, and so efforts at making particular individuals distinct are more readily apparent. Quintilius Varus and Arminius are the two clearest examples of this effort. Varus is given a helmet with a Mohawk-style plume and a distinctively rounded belly. Arminius, on the other hand, at one point receives the traditional treatment of the winged helmet and large triangular shield, and later in the series of notes seems to manifest in more traditionally Germanic garb, distinguished chiefly by a large sword in a scabbard on which three white cross marks are borne, perhaps intended to be crossing strips of leather. Several other notes in the series (see Figure 11, notes 1, 3, 4, and 8) either suggest or directly depict large masses of soldiers, but in every case there is one figure which is noticeably more distinct than the rest, and thus clearly the focus of the image. The group provides the background against which the individual distinguishes himself.

Notably, this series of notes emphasizes individual Germanic warriors more than once who have no clear identity as characters in the story of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest. This fits with the more independent character and solitary fighting style of the Germanic tribesmen. More importantly, it hints at a major distinction between the Roman soldiers and the Germanic warriors, suggesting one potential argument in regards to the reason the Germanic soldiers were successful against their adversaries. The argument that the nobility of the more solitary Germanic

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<sup>463</sup> See among other examples a series of notes from Bielefeld, cited as 103.5 and displayed in part on page 94 of Grabowski & Mehl, *Deutsches Notgeld*, Band 1.

warriors carried the day against the Roman legions, though absolutely untrue, may have been an attractive one for those elements of German society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century which sought a kind of return in spirit to the nobler days of imperial German societies. Certainly it stems from an argument about the essential character of the German, and such arguments were disseminated in *völkisch* circles during the interbellum period.<sup>464</sup>

These stylistic choices offer reasonably strong support to the themes developed in Part 1, in particular that of the strong nationalist leader, and they further hint at an intentionality behind the Notgeld's design. The most enlightening aspect of the notes, however, is how they present the historical events of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest.

### 3.2 Germans and Ancient Rome

The German preoccupation with Rome was already well-established by the time of the First World War. It extended back in time to the Holy Roman Empire, which saw itself as the successor to Rome's will, a reincarnation of the Roman Empire. It was in Rome that Johann Winckelmann wrote his famous work, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, which precipitated the general European, and particularly German, preoccupation with the art of ancient Greece. It was through the lens of the ancient art present in Rome that that work made its discoveries of ancient Greek art, Winckelmann himself having never set foot in Greece.<sup>465</sup> Outside the realm of German Hellenism, the connection to Rome was even more direct, particularly in Bavaria, where most residents continued to train their Catholic eyes on Rome, the seat of the Pope, in their search for spiritual guidance.

In this context, it may seem strange that Germans could so easily reconcile a story about a Germanic commander's expulsion of the Roman Empire with their perceived inheritance of that same Empire. They appear, however, to have done so with little difficulty. Both Arminius and Augustus (as an embodiment of Rome) served as inspiration for Germans in the early

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<sup>464</sup> Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, 15.

<sup>465</sup> E. M. Butler, *The Tyranny of Greece Over Germany* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 38-43.

twentieth century, and they do not appear to have struggled much with the dissonance between the two.

This is most understandable under the assumption that Germans saw themselves less as literal inheritors of the Roman Empire and more as inheritors of its imperial spirit. Put another way, it is possible that Germans embraced a nostalgic and non-synchronous understanding of the relationship of ancient Rome to their contemporary Germany. Rome and Arminius would have been used, in that case, for much the same purpose: to instill pride and a sense of nationalistic belonging in the people of the young German state. They were championed particularly by those who emphasized militarism and the values of the old imperial order, the Völkisch Germans, and the appearances they make in Notgeld are sympathetic to Völkisch ideals.

### 3.3 Textual Evidence



Figure 11: A ten-part series of notes from Detmold, issued in 1920. Only the backs are displayed.

Almost without exception, text found on Notgeld notes depicting the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest follows the story told by the Detmold Notgeld series. That text is reproduced

below, with numbering to indicate where one note's part of the story ends and the next begins.

Numbers correspond with the number at the bottom center of the image on each note.

- 1: Als die Römer frech geworden / zogen sie nach Deutschlands Norden /  
Vorne mit Trompetenschall / ritt der Generalfeldmarschall / Herr Quintilius Varus
- 2: In dem Teutoburger Walde / Hui! Wie pfiiff der Wind so kalte!  
Raben flogen durch die Luft / und es war ein Moderduft / wie von Blut und Leichen
- 3: Plötzlich aus des Waldes duster / brachen krampfhaft die Cherusker /  
Mit Gott für König und Vaterland / Stürzten sie sich Wutenbrannt / auf die Legionen
- 4: Weh, das war ein grosses Morden / Sie erschlugen die Kohorten /  
Nur die Röm'sche Reiterei / rettete sich in das Frei / denn sie war zu Pferde
- 5: O Quintili, armer Feldherr! / Dachttest du, dass so die Welt wär /  
Er geriet in einen Sumpf / verlor zwei Stiefel und einen Strumpf / und blieb elend stecken
- 6: Da sprach er voll Aergernüssen / zu Herrn Centurio Titiussen /  
Kamerade, zeuch dein Schwert hervor / und von hinten mich durchbohr / weil doch alles futsch ist
- 7: In dem armen Röm'schen Heere / diente auch als Volontäre /  
Scaevola ein Rechtskandidat / den man schnöd gefangen hat / wie die Andern alle
- 8: Als das Morden war zu Ende / rieb Fürst Herrmann sich die Hände /  
und um sich noch mehr zu freu'n / lud er die Cherusker ein / zu 'nem grossen Frühstück
- 9: Nur in Rom war man nicht heiter / sondern kaufte Trauerkleider /  
Grade als beim Mittagmahl / Augustus sass im Kaisersaal / kam die Trauerbotschaft
- 10: Und zu ehren der Geschichten / tat ein Denkmal man errichten /

Deutschlands Kraft und Einigkeit / verkündet es jetzt weit und breit / mögen sie nur kommen!

In English, the text roughly translates to:

- 1: When the Romans became brazen / they advanced upon the north of Germany /  
At their head to the sound of trumpets / rode the general field marshal / Quintilius Varus
- 2: in the Teutoburg Forest / Oh! How cold the wind blew!  
Ravens flew through the air / and there was a murderous scent / like that of blood and corpses
- 3: Suddenly from the forest's darkness / frantically broke the Cherusci /  
With God for King and Fatherland / they fell in a fury / upon the legions
- 4: Woe, that was a great slaughter / they [the Cherusci] slew the cohorts /  
Only the Roman cavalry / escaped to safety / because they were on horses
- 5: Oh Quintilius, poor commander! / Did you imagine the world to be different /  
He became stuck in a swamp / lost two boots and a stocking / and remained forlornly stuck
- 6: From there he spoke outraged / to Centurio Titiussen /  
Companion, draw your sword / and pierce me from behind / for everything is lost
- 7: In the poor Roman army / there served as a Volunteer /  
Scaevola, an upright man / who had been despicably captured / like all the others
- 8: When the slaughter was over / Prince Hermann rubbed his hands together /

And in order to please them even more / he invited the Cherusci / to a large breakfast  
9: Only in Rome were the people not cheerful / but instead bought mourning clothes /  
Just when, at his midday meal, / Augustus sat down in the emperor's hall / the sad news came  
10: And to honor the stories / a memorial was erected /  
Germany's strength and unity / it now proclaims far and wide / may you come to see it!

The poem follows accepted historical accounts of the battle in large part, but the few deviations it does make are telling. Three major departures from the historical account are evident: the use of nationalistic references to Germany, the conditions of that nationalism which are posited, and the replacement of the name “Arminius” with “Herrmann.”<sup>466</sup>

The fact that any reference to “Germany” is made at all in the poem should be an instant red flag to any student of history, since the nation-state we know as Germany didn't exist until 1871, and even the concept of Germany would have likely been alien to those the Romans called Germans, who by all accounts were a myriad collection of independent tribes.<sup>467</sup> Despite this fact, references to Germany crop up throughout the poem, both as a geographic region and in the form of a nationalistic ideal, the ‘Fatherland’. These references should not be mistaken for anything other than presentism, the projection of contemporary teleological and triumphalist ideals into the past. This anachronistic use of nationalist terminology to describe the area and combatants of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest may have been a product of carelessness on the part of the particular authors; but given that parts of this same poem show up in notes from other issuing authorities, it seems more likely that the choice of such terminology was deliberate.<sup>468</sup> Certainly, the issuing authorities sought to emphasize nationalistic tenets like unity, strength and a shared history. Despite the local origin of these notes, Detmold is offered significance only as the location of the memorial to the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest. No attempt is made to connect Detmold's citizens specifically to the brave, warlike Cherusci. Instead, a greater leap is taken and the tribal confederacy is referred to as “Germans,” as if their members hailed from all parts of

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<sup>466</sup> The spelling of “Herrmann” with two r's seems to be an idiosyncrasy of this particular note. The traditional spelling, “Hermann,” is therefore used throughout, except when explicitly quoting from the note itself.

<sup>467</sup> Wells, *The Battle That Stopped Rome*, 21.

<sup>468</sup> See Figure 9 on page 30.

Germany and their motivation for fighting stemmed from love of Germany, which at the time did not exist as a concept either in the minds of the Romans who wrote about the Germanic tribes or, as far as history can tell, in the minds of any of the Germanic tribes themselves. The text presents the conflict as one between the powerful Roman Empire and the more powerful Germany, as though two centralized powers were clashing. This deliberate appeal to nonexistent similarities between the Germanic confederacy and Rome argues for the legitimacy of Germany's inheritance of the Roman Empire, as the only state that had proven itself worthy by defeating Rome.



Figure 12: The back of the third note from Figure 11 (Detmold, 1920).

In addition to the use of terms like “Germany” and “Fatherland,” two more specific conditions are mentioned which directly contradict the accounts of the battle that contemporary Germans would have had access to, and indeed continue to contradict what is known about the Germanic tribes in the first century A.D. These specifications are both contained in the phrase “Mit Gott für König und Vaterland”, translated as “With God for King and Fatherland.” “Gott,” meaning “God,” presented as it is in the singular form and without any qualifying phrase attached to it, appears to refer quite unabashedly to Christianity, which didn’t gain traction in Rome until the late third and early fourth century A.D., and reached the Germanic tribes several centuries later. In fact, it would have been absolutely impossible for Arminius and his followers



to be Christian; the battle occurred in the year 13 A.D., years before Jesus of Nazareth would be crucified. This anachronistic attribution of Christianity to the Germanic warriors could serve no purpose other than to instill pride and a sense of shared history and values in the common Germans who read and carried the notes. The term “König,” meaning “king,” serves a similar purpose, but further directs the focus on Germany’s imperial past. Arminius was no king, indeed not even the sole leader of his own tribe, and the people he gathered under him remained united only for that campaign. Indeed, only Caesar Augustus could be considered kinglike in any real political sense, and it is precisely such a comparison that the use of the word “king” seems meant to invite. This series of notes was printed during the time of the Weimar Republic in Germany, a time when there could be said to have been a German nation but certainly no king. With this single phrase in context, two separate moments in time – the moment contemporary with the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest and a later point in German history wherein “Gott, König” and “Vaterland” were all deeply meaningful terms – are made into one. It is a fiction, but a fiction not to be taken lightly. The emphasis on German unity, the rule of a single, powerful king, and the moral law of God over him expressed central tenets of the Holy Roman Empire, which was invoked as part of the nostalgic non-synchronism which permeated Völkisch German thought after World War I.<sup>469</sup>



Figure 13: The back of the eighth note from Figure 11 (Detmold, 1920).

<sup>469</sup> Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, 43.

Arminius is not given as the name of the commander for the Germanic tribal confederacy, but rather Herrmann. This name has grown out of a long-standing mythology surrounding Arminius which got its start with Tacitus' description of the general as the "liberator of Germany".<sup>470</sup> Later generations in the Holy Roman Empire and Germany took this title to heart, and woodcuts and various other art forms depicting Arminius became popular in the German-speaking world. Martin Luther, a great admirer of Arminius, may have been the first to Germanize the name to Hermann.<sup>471</sup> Subsequent generations of nationalists increasingly adopted the name Hermann instead of Arminius as the mythology surrounding the figure increased, and he became known as the "guarantor of German freedom against the outside aggressor."<sup>472</sup> This name change reflects an attempt to appropriate Arminius as entirely as possible from the Romans, to make him into the quintessential German. It may have also served to eliminate at least one reminder that the skill Arminius had as a tactician had been developed by his time in the Roman army. It was important that Arminius be seen as a German; his background of Roman experience was at best unimportant and at worst damaging to that image, and this may be in part why the Germanized version of his name took hold so quickly and firmly in the German-speaking world. Interestingly, fervor for "Hermann" is considered by historians to have reached its peak at the end of World War I, before which the mythologized story was a part of the history component of elementary school curriculum in Germany.<sup>473</sup> This spirit seems to have waned in the general public since then, but rose strikingly to the forefront with the ascent of the Nazi party, a fact that will be discussed at the conclusion of this paper.

### **3.4 Part 3, Conclusion**

The Germanic unity experienced on the battlefield at the Teutoburg Forest was notably short-lived. By all accounts, Arminius brought disparate Germanic tribes together under his

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<sup>470</sup> Wells, *The Battle That Stopped Rome*, 34.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

leadership for that battle, and once it had been won the confederacy splintered apart as warriors returned to their own tribes. Moreover, it was only a few years after his victory in the Teutoburg Forest that Arminius was killed by members of his own tribe. Ironically, he appears to have been targeted based on a belief that he wished to make himself a king in the Roman style, ruling over the Cherusci tribe and conquering other Germanic tribes in the area. The Germanic tribes seem to have been fiercely democratic at this point in history, and they refused to allow this usurpation of their collective power, to the point that they were willing to kill their greatest hero<sup>474</sup> to preserve their relatively autonomous way of life. When Arminius died, with his desires for personal power and Germanic unity thwarted, he could not have known that his story would be used as propaganda, an example to Weimar Germany of a noble, unified Germanic kingdom powerful enough to defeat and inherit the greatest empire the world had ever known. Such a kingdom never existed, but the mythology was powerful, and its distinctly military character was not lost on *völkisch* thinkers, but rather became a great point of emphasis in their ideology.

#### **Part 4: Notgeld and the Völkisch German Warrior**

By the end of World War I, modernity and the promises associated with it had given way to shock and despondence, as the defeated Germans attempted to cope with the horrific destruction of life, loss of pride and massive economic debt which the so-called Great War had left them. As inflation began to skyrocket and the situation continued to worsen, *Völkisch* Germans started to form a reactionary opinion of the modernism that they blamed, at least in part, for the war and the subsequent economic hardship. They recalled the glory of the Holy Roman Empire of centuries past. Such reminiscence had, in many parts of Germany, a distinctly militaristic cast to it, and judging by the variety of notes that contain images of militaristic nostalgia, this sentiment was widely held.

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<sup>474</sup> And he surely was; Germanic tribal members from various member tribes of the confederacy continued to visit the site of the battle for many years after it had been fought, to the point where it became an extremely popular pilgrimage destination for a time (Ibid, 198.)

## 4.1 Swords

One of the most pervasive themes of nostalgia in Notgeld involves swords. By this point in German history, swords had already been made completely obsolete as effective weapons by the advent of mechanical projectile weapons like the machine gun. Since that time, there has been little practical use for swords in war. Despite this, the sword appears frequently in Notgeld, showing up in particular in notes from the cities of Hammelburg, Immenstadt, Königshofen, and two different examples of notes from Kaufbeuren.



Figure 14: Two notes from Kaufbeuren, one issued in October, 1918 (right) and one issued in June, 1918 (left). Only the backs are displayed here. For the front of the second Kaufbeuren note (left), see Figure 16.

Swords are especially prominently on these two Kaufbeuren notes. In the first note (left side) it is depicted in a sheath at the side of a man on the note, and in the second note (right side) it serves as both the centerpiece and focal point of the image on the back side of the note. The size of the sword image compared to the rest of the second Kaufbeuren note is only rivaled by the two swords on the Hammelburg note (see Figure 15), which are set off to either side of the central image but span almost the entire height of the print area on the note. On the back of the Immenstadt note (see Figure 15), the other image where a sword appears, the depicted weapon is smaller, but still far from incidental. It unmistakably identifies the man depicted on the note as a soldier. In all these notes, swords play prominent roles, promoting a military theme which is also clearly nostalgic in nature, harkening back to the days of the Holy Roman Empire.

## 4.2 Helmets/Equipment

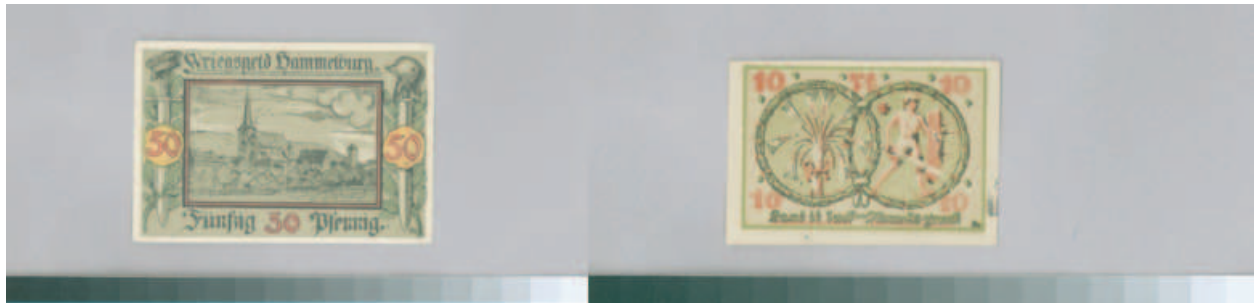


Figure 15: A note from Hammelburg, issued in 1918 (left), and a note from Immenstadt, issued in 1918 (right). Only the backs are displayed.

In the Hammelburg, Immenstadt, Königshofen, and second Kaufbeuren notes, helmets also play a noteworthy role. These images of helmets are commonly associated with the sword images. The Hammelburg note shows a modern-style helmet and an equally modern officer's cap hung on the hilts of respective swords. In the Immenstadt note, the soldier seems to be wearing a modern helmet, in sharp contrast to his plain wooden shield, simple shorts, and basic sword. Finally, in the second Kaufbeuren note, a large modern-style helmet occupies the same area on the front of the note that the sword occupies on the note's back.



Figure 16: The front of the second note from Kaufbeuren, issued in June, 1918. For the back of this note, see Figure 14.

This juxtaposition between the obsolete swords and the contemporary helmets is a telling one, both because of what isn't depicted and because of what is. Guns would seem to promote the military themes expressed in the images at least as effectively as swords, and provide a more logical fit for the modern helmets. However, the choice was made by the issuing authorities, independently in each case, to present the images of medieval swords and modern helmets.

This decision seems strange on the surface, but in reality it is another symptom of the reactionary modernism that the National Socialists would later use to their advantage in reconstructing a totalitarian German state in their own image. Contemporary weapons in those images have been consciously rejected by the artists and publishers of the notes in favor of an ancient and practically obsolete symbol of strength, a reminder of the power and respect that the German people wielded in the Holy Roman Empire in an age now long gone, but remembered with almost mystical reverence: medieval Europe.

The juxtaposition of the helmet and the sword seems to indicate a promise, too, that Germany is capable of regaining the power it used to have in the days of the first Empire, that rebirth isn't out of reach but merely waiting in the future. In this sense, the notes do not merely indicate a literal yearning for an earlier time; the stylistic non-synchronism of the helmets and swords in the images can be thought of as bearing a more symbolic character, invoking the past with an eye to the future.

### **4.3 Soldiers and Farmers**

Another persistent, prophetic theme in Notgeld and the wider German culture of the interbellum period—one especially evident in Bavaria—was a preoccupation with soldiers and farmers. Two notes in particular, the Immenstadt note and, especially, the Königshofen note, illustrate this point well. The printed image on the back of the Immenstadt note is framed by overlapping circles, with a sword-wielding soldier in one circle and a bundle of already-harvested wheat in the other. The circles, made out of some kind of fabric or plant matter, are bound together at one of the overlapping points on the diagram, drawing attention to the overlapping parts of the circles, as well as each circle individually. Beyond that, the binding is

symbolic of the indivisibility of the two circles, and the contents therein. The image glorifies farmer and soldier, and binds them inextricably to one another.



Figure 17: The back of a note from Immenstadt, issued in 1918. This note is also displayed as part of Figure 15.

The Königshofen note is, if possible, even more explicit. On one side, a soldier with a shield and an axe is the centerpiece of the note's image, surrounded by an oval of text. On the opposite side of the note, in the same location and also surrounded by a ring of text, stands a farmer. She is wiping sweat from her brow and carrying a bag around her waist with various implements in it. Most notable among these tools is a scythe, presumably for cutting wheat. The juxtaposition of the soldier and the farmer, and the otherwise nearly identical design around them, clearly mark them as associated. Again, the note equates the two professions as different sides of the same coin, dual efforts with the same goal: returning Germany to the prosperity and pride that the country enjoyed in the days when being a farmer meant cutting wheat with a scythe and being a soldier meant wielding a sword or an axe.



Figure 18: The front (left) and back (right) of a note from Königshofen, issue date unnoted.

#### 4.4 Nobility & Flags

The appeal to the glory of the medieval world also occasionally invokes representations of nobility. Two of the notes, the Wunsiedel note and the first Kaufbeuren note, show images of men who are clearly noblemen. In the Wunsiedel note, the nobleman is depicted riding a horse and wearing clothes that clearly show his upper-class status.





Figure 19: The back of a note from Wunsiedel, issued in 1918.

He's sitting straight up in the saddle, with his chest thrust slightly forward, and seems confident and somehow larger than life. The overall image is a reassuring picture of leadership, one which is echoed in the first Kaufbeuren note.



Figure 20: The back of the first Kaufbeuren note, issued in October 1918. This image is also displayed as part of Figure 14.

In this note, the man is not on horseback, but is standing before the walls of what looks to be a castle or medieval city. He is dressed as a nobleman, standing tall, and raising a flag in one hand while holding the other arm behind his back in a very charismatic pose.

Despite both depicted leaders clearly belonging to the same land-owning feudal class, which at this point in history no longer explicitly existed in Germany, and despite the fact that both seem to be in some way prepared for a form of war that was already obsolete in the contemporary period in which the note was printed, each one is depicted alone. The nobleman in each case is thereby shown as strong, able to stand by himself.

Each nobleman is also holding a flag, which in both notes draws the eye, either in curiosity regarding the symbols on it or, as in the case of the first Kaufbeuren note, simply because the nobleman depicted hoists it high in apparent pride. The flag seems to be almost a part of each noble, a symbolic extension of his authority and the imposition of his will. This powerful depiction of nobility and their association with flags was not lost on Hitler and his Nazi party. In fact, they used these images to their advantage during their political campaigns and reign in power, which especially made use of flags bearing their swastika insignia, a symbol of their power.

#### **4.5 Background**

A similarly pervasive nostalgic theme persisting across the body of notes can be found in the background depicted. In the Wunsiedel, Hammelburg, and both Kaufbeuren notes, a cityscape is shown on the printed section of the back. The scenes are of entirely classic medieval architecture, furthering the nostalgic themes that permeate every note. Additionally, in every scene, an effort seems to have been made to depict towers and tall, imposing buildings, frequently juxtaposed with houses.

Interestingly, only two of the notes depict towers that could potentially belong to churches, and none of the images give a certain indication that any of the buildings shown are churches. Instead, the tall buildings are fairly nondescript and imposing. There is one such tower behind a house in the background of the Wunsiedel note, which seems to be an architectural

representation of the noble and his flag, one in the Hammelburg note's main image, the tall spire of which calls to mind the swords that frame it on either side, two in the background of the first Kaufbeuren note which appear to be supporting the flag from beneath, and two in the background of the second Kaufbeuren note which seem to provide the same service for the ribbon of text that circles about the sword featured in that note. In each instance, the buildings physically support or imitate the focal image of the note, and contribute to the larger-than-life character of those images, particularly in the cases of the nobles. These ideas of architecture as at once impressively imposing and supportive of a specific idea or image were the same concepts appropriated by the National Socialists a decade later in the construction of their Fascist architecture.

#### **4.6 Written Text**

In the Königshofen note and the second Kaufbeuren note, a message is provided in the text. In the Königshofen note, the text encircles the central image on both sides. It declares that if people would go back to work and work diligently, Germany could be made economically healthy again. This text surrounds the medieval soldier and medieval farmer which form the front and back central images in an apparent appeal to the glorious past of the Holy Roman Empire. The message might also be read as an appeal to national pride in the hopes of motivating people to persevere through the harsh contemporary economic situation and work diligently until Germany becomes an economic world power once again. On some level, too, it suggests the methods for achieving this economic resurgence, encouraging – intentionally or not – the primacy of farming and war in thinking about German resurgence.

The second Kaufbeuren note displays a ribbon of text that threads its way through the rest of the image, loosely circling the sword in its center.



Figure 21: The back of the second Kaufbeuren note, issued in June, 1918. This image is also displayed as part of Figure 14.

That text reads, “Die Schwertschmied-Stadt im alten Reich wünscht deutschem Schwerte guten Streich,” which loosely translates as “the sword-smithing city in the old Empire wishes German swords a good stroke.” This statement clearly has much less to do with getting Germans back to work and much more to do with war and the imperial notion of conquest as a source of pride. It also provides a blatant example of militaristic nostalgia. By June of 1918, when this note was printed, swords were clearly not involved in any meaningful way with the war effort of World War One.

Despite this, the note doesn’t depict a rifle or a machine gun. It doesn’t directly encourage Germans to weather the trenches or fire accurately or charge bravely or not give up hope on the war effort, all things that would have been relevant for soldiers at that point in time. Instead, it invokes the city of Kaufbeuren’s historical fame as a sword-smithing city in the “alten Reich“ – that is, the Holy Roman Empire – and it encourages German soldiers to metaphorically swing true with their swords. The creators of the note deliberately chose to invoke the name of the Holy Roman Empire in this note of encouragement to German troops on the frontlines of the Great War, and instead of drawing the connection between the old Empire and the new Empire, decided their thread of continuity would be the physical and metaphoric use of swords. This message is clearly an appeal to the perceived glory of the middle ages, subtly invoked in the form of a metaphor.

#### 4.7 Part 4, Conclusion

The preoccupation with medieval war iconography evident in German Notgeld intentionally conveyed a proud view of German military endeavors during that time. It should not, however, be seen as exemplifying a desire to return to that past. “Die Schwertschmied-Stadt im alten Reich” clearly has no wish to begin forging swords for war once again. Instead, the focus is on the power and respect German states wielded in the past, and the notes are intended to inspire the modern German people to reclaim it for themselves. In this way, nostalgia and non-synchronism are instrumentalized in a hopeful vision of a future rooted not in the uncertainty of the unfamiliar, but rather one which marries the technological advances of the present with the familiar, comfortable values of the past.

#### Part 5: Conclusion

I have explicated in these pages three major *völkisch* themes present in the emergency currency called Notgeld: the German inheritance of Rome, the honorable and warlike Holy Roman Empire, and the devastation caused to Germany by the Treaty of Versailles and the destruction of Imperial Germany. There are many smaller themes evident in and among these overarching ideals as well, and I have addressed some of them, but it is most important to note that a single common theme threads its way through all three chapters: the creation of empire through war.

*Völkisch* Germans formed a strong element of the basis of party support for the Nazis.<sup>475</sup> In Hitler’s political maneuvers leading up to World War II, there are eerie echoes of many of the Notgeld notes I have focused on in the preceding pages. From his return to a militaristic society with conservative social values, to his apparent solution of the economic crisis, to his stated political objectives in winning back ethnically German lands, his policies seemed designed to please this particular political subculture.

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<sup>475</sup> Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, 6.

This work makes it clear that the National Socialists could have easily made themselves well aware of the *völkisch* ideals they would later express through local Notgeld. The ubiquitous nature of the strange alternative currency-turned-cultural artifact meant that many, perhaps most, Germans had access to these opinions and beliefs. In fact, Notgeld may well have served a purpose beyond reflecting the ideas of its commissioners. It may have helped them worm their way into the minds of the general public, due to its wide dissemination as an intended form of currency. This is something that the Nazis clearly recognized. During election campaigns as early as 1923, they disseminated propaganda in the form of Notgeld.<sup>476</sup>

It is clear from other scholarship on the matter that *völkisch* Germans were in fact ideological predecessors of the National Socialist German Workers Party.<sup>477</sup> They adhered to a peculiarly German brand of fascism which saw the world not as primarily mutable but rather subjected it to absolute categories of mystical nature.<sup>478</sup> They believed the German was fundamentally war-like, strong and proud, and this view, coupled with a preoccupation with universal truth, produced a Germanic sense of manifest destiny.<sup>479</sup> As seen in Notgeld, the German people were fated for empire, predestined for glory which they would win through war. This is the prevailing attitude depicted in this currency and, at least publicly, it was also the attitude of the Nazi party.

Most of the research on pre-Nazi cultural trends in Germany has focused on the ideological leanings of the upper classes in Germany.<sup>480</sup> It is important to note that this particular class has not been the focus of this study, but rather the bureaucrats and business owners who commissioned Notgeld, as well as the middle class, small-town citizens who collected and kept them. The ideas of the *völkisch* movement may have been developed by the intellectual elite, but

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<sup>476</sup> Liliane Weissberg, "Notenverkehr: Antisemitische Motive und Texte auf dem Notgeld der 20er Jahre," *Abgestempelt: judenfeindliche Postkarten: auf der Grundlage der Sammlung Wolfgang Haney*, 1999. ILLiad (ISBN: 9783829570107), 282.

<sup>477</sup> See: Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, and Peter Fritzsche, *Germans Into Nazis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>478</sup> Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, 315.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid*, 86-87.

<sup>480</sup> Hedgepeth, "The Palimpsestic Identity: Residual Discourses on Jews Exemplified by German Notgeld", 40.

the real power behind the movement seems to have come from the consumers and commissioners of Notgeld, who would become the soldiers and bureaucrats of the Third Reich.

These groups embraced proto-fascist sentiments and helped carry them to fruition in the re-emergence of Germany as an imperial military power, not by turning back the clock to the days before the Weimar Republic, but by integrating elements—particularly images and rituals—of the old imperial order into the new Third Reich. They embraced the nostalgia and non-synchronous attitudes which allowed the Nazis to rise to power in Germany. And when the public offered their tacit support to Hitler and his regime, it is unlikely that any of them thought back ten or fifteen years to the emergency currency they used to trade, to the notes which now sat in a binder collection in their home, having survived the fires which consumed most of their actual cash in the desperate days of hyperinflation. It is unlikely that anyone asked themselves why they had saved those monetarily worthless bits of paper, but if they had, they would have had to answer that it was not the note itself, not the quality of the ink which colored it or the name of the printing firm stamped on it that made it valuable to them. It was the idea and the ideology that it represented, the promise it whispered to them in those dark times that Germany had been great, and Germany would be great again. They ate up one lie after another, almost certainly unaware that the propaganda they were consuming would lead them down a tragic path. Had the consumers of Notgeld thought carefully about the agency behind it, about the selective depictions in evidence on the notes, about the information that was absent or dissonant, they might have recognized the danger. As it was, they ignored the real writing on the wall.

Notgeld still has much to say about the cultural attitudes of middle-class Germans in the years leading up to the formation of the Third Reich, and its status first as functional currency and second as cultural collectors' item enables it to offer a unique window into middle-class culture in the Weimar Republic. This is a piece of the interbellum German puzzle which is largely missing from existing literature, and the light it sheds on the extent of fascist sympathy in pre-Nazi Germany is a valuable contribution to our understanding of that period in German history. Notgeld may also have unique insights to offer other cultures. After all, intellectual movements may be determined by what intellectuals create, but cultural movements are often determined by what the plurality of citizens is willing, or even eager, to consume.

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