one hopes that those who are being called upon to assist in
utilization of demands based on these appropriations of his-
whether in Europe, the Middle East, or elsewhere, will be
skeptical of them. Failing even this, historians have a duty to
out, even if they are certain to be ignored.

Chapter One

A Poisoned Landscape: Ethnicity and Nationalism
in the Nineteenth Century

Modern history was born in the nineteenth century, conceived
and developed as an instrument of European nationalism. As a
tool of nationalist ideology, the history of Europe’s nations was a
great success, but it has turned our understanding of the past into
a toxic waste dump, filled with the poison of ethnic nationalism,
and the poison has seeped deep into popular consciousness.
Cleaning up this waste is the most daunting challenge facing his-
torians today.

The real history of the nations that populated Europe in the
early Middle Ages begins not in the sixth century but in the eight-
teenth. This is not to deny that people living in the distant past had
a sense of nation or collective identity. But the past two centuries
of intellectual activity and political confrontation have so utterly
changed the ways we think about social and political groups that
we cannot pretend to provide an “objective” view of early medieval
social categories, unencumbered by this recent past. Not only is
ethnic nationalism, as we currently understand it, in a certain sense
an invention of this recent period, but, as we shall see, the very tools of analysis by which we pretend to practice scientific history were invented and perfected within a wider climate of nationalism and nationalist preoccupations. Rather than neutral instruments of scholarship, the modern methods of researching and writing history were developed specifically to further nationalist aims. Since both the object and method of investigation are suspect, it is only fair to recognize the subjective nature of our investigation at the outset by briefly reviewing the process that led to their invention.

Ethnic Nationalism and the Age of Revolution

The story of the emergence of nationalism in the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century has been told many times. The ethnically based nation-states of today have been described as “imagined communities,” called into being by the creative efforts of nineteenth-century intellectuals and politicians, who transformed earlier, romantic, nationalist traditions into political programs. Indeed, a rash of books and articles—some scholarly, others aimed at a general public—argue that many “age-old traditions,” from national identities to Scottish plaid, are the recent and cynical invention of politicians or entrepreneurs. There is much truth to this characterization, especially since it draws attention to the formative role played in the recent past by individuals and groups in the elaboration of supposedly ancient ideologies. At the same time, however, it would be absurd to suggest that, because these communities are in some sense “imagined,” they should be dismissed or trivialized, or to imply that “somehow imagined” is synonymous either with “imaginary” or “insignificant.”

First, while the specific forms of ethnically based nation-states of today may indeed have been called into being by the efforts of nineteenth-century romantics and nationalists, this does not mean that other forms of imagining nations did not exist in the past—forms equally powerful as, even if very different from, those of the modern world. Nineteenth-century scholars, politicians, and poets did not simply make up the past; they drew on pre-existing traditions, written sources, legends, and beliefs, even if they used them in new ways to forge political unity or autonomy. Second, even if these communities are in a sense imagined, they are very real and very powerful: All important historical phenomena are in some sense psychological, and mental phenomena—from religious extremism to political ideology—have probably killed more people than anything but the Black Death.

The specific process through which nationalism emerged as a potent political ideology has varied by region across Europe and well beyond. In regions lacking political organization, such as Germany, nationalism provided an ideology to create and augment state power. In large states, such as France and Great Britain, governments and ideologues ruthlessly suppressed minority languages, cultural traditions, and variant memories of the past, in favor of a united national history and homogeneous language and culture that could claim to extend far into the past. In polyethnic empires, such as those of the Ottomans or Habsburgs, individuals identifying themselves as members of oppressed minorities used nationalism to claim the right not only to a separate cultural existence but also, as a consequence, to political autonomy.

A fairly typical version of how the ideology of nationalism gives rise to independence movements, particularly in Eastern and Central Europe, posits three stages in the process of creating these imagined communities. They include, first, the study of the language, culture, and history of a subject people by a small group of “awakened” intellectuals; second, the transmission of the scholars’ ideas by a group of “patriots” who disseminate them throughout society; and finally, the stage at which the national movement
reaches its mass apogee. With minor variations, this process can be traced from Germany in the eighteenth century across much of the Ottoman, Habsburg, and Russian empires in the nineteenth century, and, ultimately, to colonial and postcolonial Asia, Africa, and the Americas in the twentieth century.

Most students of nationalism would not dispute this general description of the process of national awakening and politicization. Hotly disputed, however, is whether the original reflection by “awakened” intellectuals merely acknowledges a pre-existing and repressed people or if these intellectuals invent the very people that they study. The historian of Croatia, Ivo Banac, for example, differs from many when he argues that “In order to be accepted, an ideology must proceed from reality. Nationalism can attempt to deal with the conditions of its group’s subjugation, but it cannot manufacture the conditions.” At one level he is certainly correct: If individuals do not experience subjugation and discrimination, promises of remedies are unlikely to be effective. However, understood in a different sense, such a formulation is potentially dangerous: It implies that the groups—potential nations, as it were—exist even before intellectuals recognize them; that the conditions of subjugation are peculiar to a given group; and that nationalism is the appropriate cure for these ills. In other words, while nationalism may not create the conditions, it can certainly manufacture the nation itself. In the nineteenth century, under the influence of revolution and romanticism, and with the apparent failure of the old aristocratic order in the political arena, intellectuals and politicians created new nations, nations that they then projected into the distant past of the early Middle Ages.

The intellectual context in which modern nationalism was born was initially the fascination with the ancient world on the part of European scholarly elites, particularly in France and Germany. Fascination with classical culture and civilization—cultivated especially in the Netherlands and then in France and in German universities such as Göttingen—set the stage for a radical reversal of self-perceptions and identity, sweeping away centuries of very different social identities.

Group Identity Before Nationalism

During the high Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, “nation”—along with religion, kindred, lordship, and social stratum—provided one of the overlapping ways by which politically active elites identified themselves and organized collaborative action. However, a sense of belonging to a nation did not constitute the most important of these bonds. Nor did a common national identity unite the high and low, lord and peasant, into a deeply felt community of interest. Even less did intellectuals and social elites find their primary self-identification by projecting their national identities into a distant past of the migration period. Rather, to the extent that they looked to the ancient past for solidarity, they identified self-consciously with Roman society and culture.

Progressively, however, from the Renaissance on, European intellectuals in France, Germany, and Eastern Europe began to identify with the victims of Roman imperialist expansion, the Gauls, the Germans, or the Slavs. This transformation of identity took place within political contexts that determined their directions. In Renaissance France, which experienced tremendous continuity in its monarchy, the reality of the state was never in doubt but the existence of a single French people was. In Germany, ever since the ninth century, authors occasionally spoke of a German people, but, in the absence of a unified German state, the identification of a German cultural tradition did not necessarily demand a corresponding political tradition. In other areas, such as Poland, a “national” sense was claimed as the exclusive domain of the aristocracy, who felt little, if any, solidarity with the peasants who worked their lands.
French theses concerning the identity of the French developed within the context of royal absolutism and aristocratic or popular opposition. The right to rule was disputed between the king and the nobility, or first estate. Both king and nobility based their claims on the assertion that, since the time of Julius Caesar, the commoners, or third estate, constituted a race of slaves—conquered Gauls who had lost their liberty— and, as a debased population, had no right to political self-determination. This characterization drew on an older tradition, developed in the Middle Ages, that justified serfdom by a variety of intellectual constructs that reduced peasants to an inherited, almost subhuman status.\textsuperscript{5} The aristocracy, by contrast, was not of Gallic descent. Rather, they were the descendants of the Franks, that is, the “free” warriors who had entered Gaul, defeated and expelled the Roman lords, and established their rights to rule. Such claims drew on the image presented by the first-century Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus, who glorified the free Germans in contrast to Romans of his day. Such claims also demanded a particular reading of the works of Gregory of Tours and other early medieval sources to emphasize the free Germanic identity of the \textit{nation française}.\textsuperscript{6}

Who actually held this right to rule—the aristocracy, as a collectivity, or the king—was a primary point of debate. In 1588 the royal propagandist Gui de Coquille went so far as to argue that Hugh Capet, founder of the royal lineage from which all subsequent French kings descended, had been of Saxon stock. This Saxon Germanic background made his royal successor a true Frenchman, a \textit{vrai Français}.\textsuperscript{6} In the eighteenth century, aristocrats such as Louis de Saint-Simon, François de Salignac de Fénélon, and Henri de Bougainvilliers, agreed that the population of Gaul in Late Antiquity was essentially a race of slaves. In the fifth century, free Frankish warriors had acquired Gaul by right of conquest. They alone, and their descendants—the nobility—were the true French. The king should share power with them, as had been the case in the days of Charlemagne.

An analogous tradition developed in Poland, where elites attempted to deny that they were of Slavic origin altogether. As early as the mid-sixteenth century, Polish chroniclers had claimed that the Polish elite should be identified not with the masses of Slavic peasants who worked the lands but with the Sarmatians, an ancient steppe people mentioned by Greek and Roman ethnographers.\textsuperscript{7} By the seventeenth century, the Sarmatian origins thesis had become a vehicle by which the elite szlachta differentiated themselves ethnically from their social inferiors.\textsuperscript{8}

\textbf{Revolutionary Nationalism}

The French Revolution changed everything and nothing in this vision of the past. Particularly in France, the popular propaganda of the revolutionary period accepted this bipartite schema of Franks and Gauls, but reversed the values derived from it. In his influential pamphlet on the third estate, the French revolutionary theorist Abbé Sieyès accepted the Germanic origin of the nobility, but argued that this made them a foreign, conquering element in France. The true French people, descendants of the Gauls, had long borne the yoke of foreign servitude, first under the Romans and then under the Franks. It was time to send this alien race back to the forests of Franconia and return France to the third estate, the one true nation.

However, this nationalist claim ran counter to official revolutionary ideology that, while proclaiming the independence and sovereignty of each people, denied that a “people” could be defined by language, ethnicity, or origins. Rather, a willingness to support the common good against particular interests, to accept the liberties and laws of the Republic, were all that should be re-
CHAPTER I

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required. Nevertheless, on a more practical level, the implicit assumption persisted that a shared cultural tradition, particularly embodied in the French language, defined the French nation.

The precursors to German nationalism, Johann Gottfried Herder and the Göttingen historians, also drew on the Tacitean myth, but initially within the context of a linguistic, cultural unity, which neither presupposed nor demanded political unity. Since the rediscovery of Tacitus’s *Germania* at the end of the fifteenth century, humanists had become fascinated with the image of a free, pure Germanic people. From Conrad Celtis’s *Germania illustrata* (1491) to Jacob Wimpleling’s *Epitome rerum Germaniarum*, to Heinrich Bebel’s *Proverbia Germanica*, and beyond, authors sought a German unity and history. However, this unity remained purely cultural, not political. German-speaking regions had never been united in a single, culturally homogeneous kingdom. Even in the Middle Ages, the “Holy Roman Empire” had always included important Slavic and Romance regions. Moreover, the deep divisions caused by the Reformation and the disasters of the Thirty Years’ War ensured that political and social unity would remain outside the sphere of this cultural perspective until the nineteenth century.10

Still, within this cultural nationalism emerged the characteristics that, when politicized, would become formidable tools of political mobilization. These included the belief that a German “nation” had existed as early as the first century, when Arminius defeated the Roman general Varus and destroyed his army in the Teutoburg Forest in 9 c.e. These cultural nationalists also exalted the German language, which they saw as the embodiment of German identity, and emphasized the importance of education as a means of continuing and intensifying the appreciation of this heritage.

Not that this belief in the existence of a German “nation” implied a political mission, especially not an expansive one. Nothing is stronger evidence of the lack of a political dimension in Herder’s thought than the idea that not only Germany but, indeed, every nationality was entitled to its own development in concord with its own genius. His enthusiasm for the Slavs was perhaps even greater than his enthusiasm for the Germans, urging the Slavic world to replace the “declining Latin-German culture” with their own. The “nationalism” of Herder and the Göttingen circle remained one of culture, not of political action.

German political nationalism emerged haltingly during the Napoleonic era in response to the French defeats of Prussia and the occupation of the Rhineland. A major force behind the creation of a popular resistance to the French, which would eventually lead to a spirit of insurrection in the populace, was Freiherr von Stein, the Prussian minister of State (1804–1808). He urged poets and writers to contribute to the image of a unified German nation once the French were ousted. The geographical outlines of this German nation were, of course, uncertain: The former Holy Roman Empire was only about 25 percent German-speaking. Prussia was a kingdom in which at least six languages, in addition to German, were used. These included Polish, Latvian, Lusitian, and Estonian, while much of the intelligensia spoke French. German-speaking regions were divided not only by politics but by dialectical differences, religion, and a history of animosity dating back to the Thirty Years’ War. Moreover, even the king of Prussia was wary of any mass movement that would involve the people in an educational or political role.

Thus, avowals of cultural unity by authors such as Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, Herder, and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing initially found no political resonance: The German princes had no interest in political concert, and the middle-class public had no political interest or agenda. Varnhagen von Ense, an educated upper-class Prussian, recalled no patriotic concern on watching the king depart Berlin in 1806 after his disastrous loss to Napoleon in the
battle of Jena. He and others of his background felt sorry for him, but "were simply unable to muster any genuine political zeal that might include an exclusive preoccupation with political reports and communiqués all day long." On the contrary, many German intellectuals with political interests were liberals and greeted Napoleon's victories with optimism.

What support there was for a politicization of Herder's cultural ideals came neither from the mainstream of the German intellectual world nor from the Prussian king but from the British, who sought to generate popular opposition to the French in the East that would continue to pressure Napoleon. The British hoped to open a "second Vendée"—an internal guerrilla resistance movement similar to that pursued by royalists in that stubborn region of France—by supporting insurrectionists in Prussia. This British goal coincided with that of Freiherr von Stein, who was convinced that the Junker class was incapable of saving Prussia and sought to develop a sense of patriotism among the educated and cultural elites of the kingdom in order to create a more effective resistance to the French. This end was to be accomplished through a mobilization of the elements of earlier generations of cultural nationalist feeling: an emphasis on common language (rather than a common religious or political tradition, both of which were entirely lacking); a program of national education; and an emphasis on the place of the citizen as the link between the past and future of the nation. Stein's interests thus dovetailed with those of the British, who funded intellectuals willing to combine culture and politics.

Chief among these German intellectuals was Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who was eager to politicize Germanic culture and did so by equating the Romans of the first century with the French of his day, and the Germanic resisters to Roman expansion with himself and his German contemporaries. The touchstone for a unified German identity thus became the descriptions of the German virtues in Tacitus’s _Germania_ and the account of Arminius and his de-

struction of Varus and his legion in Tacitus's _Annales_. This was a means of finding a German unity preceding the political complexities of the Holy Roman Empire and of showing how, in the past, Germans had resisted a Romance-speaking invader. As developed by Fichte in his _Addresses to the German Nation_, a unique German identity contrasted, on the one hand, with the Slavs, who "do not seem as yet to have developed distinctly enough in comparison with the rest of Europe to make it possible to give a definite description of them," and, on the other, with Romanized peoples of "Teutonic descent," that is, with the French. In contrast to each of these, the central virtue of German identity rested on its continuity in geography and its language. The relationship between language and identity was certainly nothing new in the nineteenth century. More than half a century earlier, the French philosopher Étienne Bonnot de Condillac had argued that "each language expresses the character of the people who speak it." Fichte, however, developed this tradition in very specific and provocative ways. As he stated in his Fourth Address, the Germans alone among the "neo-Europeans" remained in the original dwelling place of their ancestral stock and retained their original language. It was this language, in particular, that united the German people and put them in direct contact with God’s creation in a way that peoples such as the French, who had adopted Latinized language, could not hope to achieve. The reason was that, unlike Romance languages that built words from Latin and Greek roots, themselves formed in distant regions, German derived entirely from Germanic elements, originally coined to describe the world still inhabited by Germans. This language, therefore, was immediately transparent and comprehensible to all German speakers, placing them in immediate relationship with their environment and with each other.

Fichte’s _Addresses_ must certainly be understood within their immediate context: They might be termed "survivalist texts," in-
tended to give hope and foster resistance in the immediate context of a French occupation, an occupation that was widely expected to last for many years. The rapid destruction of the French Empire ended the specific need for such sentiments, but their afterlife proved of enormous consequence.

The involvement of intellectuals such as Fichte in the cause of politics may not have had much influence on the outcome of the Napoleonic wars, but it connected them to the world of politics and action in a new way. While involving them in the sphere of political action, it brought them new prominence, financial rewards, and official patronage. This potent combination did not end with the Congress of Vienna, assembled in 1815 to restore Europe after Napoleon. Stein, who had taken the leadership role in recruiting intellectuals during the war, strengthened the connection between scholars and politicians in search of a unified Germany. In 1819 he founded the “Society for Older German Historical Knowledge (Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde),” whose motto, Sanc-
tus amor patriae dat animam (The holy love of the Fatherland gives spirit), summarized a program rather than a truism. The Gesell-
schaft was a private organization, founded in consultation with such noted intellectuals as Goethe; Wilhelm von Humboldt; the Grimm brothers, Friedrich Carl von Savigny; and Karl Friedrich Eichhorn. Contributions from various German states and the German Bund financed the Gesellschaft, which dedicated itself to editing and publishing the Monumenta Germaniae Historica or the Historical Monuments of Germany. Initially, these contributions were hard to come by; the German states were not eager to contribute, and Stein was inclined to reject, for patriotic reasons, contributions from foreigners such as the Russian czar. Only gradually, as politicians realized that patriotic history could counterbalance revolutionary ideology, did Stein find the funding he needed to continue his project.

However, funding was only one problem. The other was determining just what the historical monuments of Germany were.

These were discovered according to the principles of scientific, Indo-European philology, which were being developed by classical philologists in the Netherlands and, more recently, in Göttingen.

Comparative Indo-European (or Indogermanisch) philology was born in 1786 when the English orientalist Sir William Jones recog-
nized that Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin had sprung from a common source and that Gothic, Celtic, and old Persian were probably members of the same family. Twenty-two years later, the German philologist Friedrich von Schlegel developed Jones’s insight, although he argued in his On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians (Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier), that Sanskrit was the parent language of Greek, Latin, Persian, and the Germanic languages. In the following generation, the German scholars Franz Bopp and Jacob Grimm, as well as the Dane Rasmus Rask, took these early and rather intuitive suggestions, corrected them, elaborated a method for examining language development and affinity, and created the new science of Indo-European philology. This rapidly developing new discipline made possible not only the organization and classification of the language family from which descended Slavic, Germanic, Hellenic, and Romance languages, but also the scientific study of the earliest forms of these languages. Since the Renaissance, German humanists had been fascinated by the resemblances among contemporary Germanic languages. They had marveled at the relationship between ancient languages, such as the Gothic Bible translated by the missionary Bishop Ulti-
las in the fourth century, and the community of “Crimean Goths,” allegedly still speaking a recognizably Germanic language into the sixteenth century. However, now it became possible to organize the knowledge of European languages into an interrelated and historically nuanced discipline. Philology—both the traditional classical tradition focusing on Greek and Latin texts, and the newer Germanic philology—lay at the heart of the methodological impulse of the new, scientific undertaking of the Monumenta.
The agenda of Stein's Gesellschaft was more than simply editing and publishing the sources of German history in the Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Before the sources could be edited, one had to establish a canon of those records of the past that were indeed sources of German history. This meant defining Germany in the past and laying claim to this past as inherently German. The scholars who undertook this task were not radical political nationalists. Nevertheless, their work fueled nationalist claims of extraordinary breadth. These editors claimed as these monuments all texts written in or about regions in which Germanic-speaking peoples had settled or ruled. First, the Monumenta editors claimed all those regions that had been part of the "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation," from the south of Italy to the Baltic. In addition, they annexed the whole of Frankish history, including the chronicles and acts of Merovingian and Carolingian kings in the regions of Gaul that are today France and Belgium. They absorbed the laws of the Visigoths, the Burgundians, and the Lombards, Germanic-speaking groups that had settled into what is today Italy and the Rhone valley. They appropriated the county of Flanders and all of the Netherlands east of the Schelde because these areas were settled by the Germanic-speaking Frisians. By deciding to publish the works of a series of ancient authors, they swallowed up Africans, such as Victor Vitensis, who wrote on the Germanic Vandals in Africa; Gallo-Romans like Ausonius; and Roman senators, such as Cassiodorus and Symmachus. The result of the Monumenta perspective was to define Germany in a much more sweeping manner than even the Lied der Deutschen, with its infamous lines "From the Meuse to the Memel, from the Etsch to the Belt (Von der Maas bis an die Memel/Von der Etsch bis an den Belt)," had ever dared.

By defining the corpus of what was German history, the Monumenta set the parameters within which Germany would search for its past. The Goths, the Franks, the Burgundians, the Vandals, and other early "peoples" were identified by an uninterrupted history, which preceded the establishment of the medieval Holy Roman Empire and which reached through the nineteenth century.

Philology and Nationalism

The presumed criteria for the inclusion of these "peoples" in the Historical Monuments of Germany were that they were "Germanic," that is, that they belonged to the same linguistic family as did the Germans of the nineteenth century. If the texts published by the Monumenta created the object, philology created the method. This was true in two senses. First, Indo-European philology gave new "objective" criteria to peoplehood along the lines of Herder and Fichte's mystical linguistics. Second, philology, already developed as the essential tool of classical studies, became the primary tool of medieval historical study, a tool that it used to discover the prehistory of German nationalism.

These twin tools of German nationalism—texts and philological analysis—not only created German history, but, by implication, all history. They were a readily exportable package, easily applied to any corpus of texts in any language. Moreover, since German standards of "scientific" historical scholarship increasingly dominated nineteenth-century universities in Europe and even America, foreign historians trained in the German seminar method and text-critical scholarship served as ambassadors of nationalistic analysis when they returned to their own countries. Earlier, Herder-type movements, such as pan-Slavism, were quickly politicized, and nations and would-be nations all followed suit with their own apparatus of national self-creation. These included a corpus of "monuments of national history" and philologists (many German
educated) to elucidate the ancient origins of their nations. Historical scholarship and nationalism became one.

The French reaction to the politicization of German scholarship, late and defensive, followed the catastrophe of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870. Some, such as the philologist Léon Gautier, went so far as to attribute the German victory to their training as philologists: "The Prussian fights in the same way he criticizes a text, with the same precision and method."¹³¹ The solution, obviously, was to imitate the German model, not only in creating university chairs of philology and history, of which some 250 were founded between 1876 and 1879,²⁰ but also by absorbing the philological method of the German tradition. Of course, the French attempted to purge it of its German, nationalist character, but sought to eliminate only the first adjective, not the second. Philology remained a tool of nationalism. In a manner reminiscent of Fichte, who insisted that only a natural language placed a people in proper relationship to the world, French philologists argued that the literary creations of medieval France were "indigenous plants, born spontaneously in the earth of the fatherland."²¹ Thus, ironically, while the French search for "scientific" philology was an attempt to escape "Romanticism," "Romanticism" was understood as essentially "Germanness"; to this end, the French philologists appropriated the very tools of Germanic nationalism. The resulting philology, no less a glorification of a romanticized view of the Middle Ages, was also a glorification of the French self-myth of scientific exactitude. In the process, the republican sense of "citizen," independent of any historicized national language and culture, was discarded in favor of an ethnic nationalist one.

Across Europe, the pernicious effects of the philological method of identifying people by language were myriad.²² First, the infinite gradations of broad linguistic groups in Europe were chopped up by scientific rules into separate languages. Since the spoken and written realities never corresponded exactly to these artificial rules, "official" forms—usually systematized versions of a local dialect, often of a politically powerful group or important city—were invented and imposed through state-sponsored educational systems. The result was that linguistic boundaries became much more rigid and whole traditions, oral and in some cases even written, virtually disappeared under the pressure of "standard" usage. What this amounted to was nothing less than the virtual invention of languages, including not only such obvious cases as Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Croatian, Slovene, Latvian, Hebrew, Norwegian, Irish, Dutch, and Romanian, but, in more subtle ways, German and Italian as well. Not surprisingly, proponents of these "standard" languages tended initially to ascribe them to real or desired political boundaries. In few cases did all of the population of a given polity actually speak even the favored dialect of this language. Even in a country such as France, which had centuries-long traditions of political frontiers and where norms of proper usage had been developing for centuries, probably not much more than 50 percent of French men and women spoke French as their native language in 1900. Others spoke a variety of Romance languages and dialects, while in Brittany, Alsace, and Lorraine, Celtic and Germanic languages predominated. In other cases, the national language was spoken by a distinct minority, as in Norway, or populations used a variety of languages for different purposes and in varying combinations for trade, culture, politics, or domestic life.

Thus, everywhere, individuals, families, and communities found themselves isolated from the "national language" and under pressure to give up their traditions of speech. This could mean anything from simply adopting vocabulary, standard pronunciation, and modified systems of inflections, as in the case of the inhabitants of Holland, to abandoning dialects or ancient linguistic traditions such as Provençal in the south of France. Finally, it could mean learning, in state-supported and -mandated schools, a lan-
guage from a whole different linguistic family, as in the cases of the Britons and the Basques in France or the Romanians and the Slavs in Hungary.

As a result, ambitious national educational programs, including language instruction of the sort urged by Stein, became essential for the creation of a population capable of using the national language. Thus, educational institutions became the focus for the creation of the nation-state, both through the inculcation of nationalist ideology and, more subtly, through the dissemination of a national language in which this ideology was incarnate. Language became the vehicle for teaching the national history of the “people” whose language this was and whose political aspirations the language expressed. However, the new philology allowed nationalist educators and ideologues to go even further: It made possible the creation of a national, “scientific” history that projected both national language and national ideology into a distant past.

This projection was possible because the triumph of philology had a second and equally pernicious effect on the development of nationalism. Once national languages were established—in theory if not on the lips of the population—then the rules of Indo-European philology made it possible for linguists to ascribe ancient vernacular texts, some over a thousand years old, to these languages. The rules of linguistics made it possible for scholars to claim linear descent from these early texts to modern versions of national languages. Thus, linguists could speak of the ancient monuments of their nations: The oldest texts in “German” date from the eighth century; in “French,” from the ninth; in “Slovene,” from the eleventh century; “Armenian,” from the sixth. But comparative philology made it possible to go further back still: Comparative study of different Indo-European language traditions made possible the elaboration of rules for the systematic changes in languages, allowing historical philologists to work backwards from extant versions of languages to hypothetical reconstructions of much more ancient languages from preliterate times. Thus, philologists provided nationalists with a means of projecting their nations into a distant, preliterate past. In the tradition of Fichte, they claimed that textual evidence, or lacking that, the historical philology, proved the existence of discrete “linguistic communities” sharing the same vision of life, the same social and religious values, the same political systems. The birth of peoples corresponded to the time when these separate, identifiable languages hived off from their common Germanic, Slavic, Romance, or Hellenic stock to form a linguistic and cultural unity.

A Dangerous Inheritance

This kind of language-based claim to cultural ethnicity has largely survived the discrediting of the more primitive forms of pseudo-historical nationalism. Even today, neonationalists acknowledge that the political self-consciousness of modern nationalism is a nineteenth- or twentieth-century phenomenon, yet attempt to claim that while political ethnicity is of recent vintage, cultural ethnicity is much more ancient. The people was a people, in other words, before it knew itself and language is both the sign and innermost reality of this immutable identity. Thus, journalists and international agencies reporting on so-called ethnic disturbances focus on language differences. When, for example, we are told that Lithuania is inhabited by “ethnic Lithuanians and Russians,” what this actually means is that x percent of the population of that new state speak Lithuanian as a first language and y percent speak Russian. If, as in Brittany or Ireland, such claims can no longer be made because of the massive loss of indigenous language in the past century, then what is meant is that “x percent should speak a given language because their ancestors did.”

Philologically based scientific history, drafted into the service of nationalism, led back ultimately to the period between the third
and eleventh centuries. The period between the disappearance of the Roman Empire and the formation of new communities from which modern nation-states and nationalist movements attempted to trace their legitimacy was also the period when new language groups became localizable within Europe. In this period, then, known as the moment of “primary acquisition,” the ancestors of modern nations—speaking their national language, which carried and expressed specific cultural and intellectual modes—first appeared in Europe, conquering once and for all their sacred and immutable territories and, in so doing, acquiring once and for all their natural enemies. Maps and studies of the Migration Period (or, in Romance-speaking countries, the Invasion Period) showed, in dense jumbles of lines and arrows, the appearance both within and outside of the Empire of peoples distinguished by language or dialect, custom, dress, and religion.

Ethnoarchaeology

With linguistic tools to track down peoples before they knew they were peoples, it was not long before another “scientific” discipline began to be employed to the same end. This was ethnoarchaeology. Once one could determine linguistically the location of a “people,” then it was up to archaeologists to find the physical evidence of the cultural specificities of that people. Surely if language corresponded to a specific people who shared common customs and values, these same cultural differences would be manifest in the physical artifacts recoverable by archaeologists. This quest was pursued with particular zeal by German archaeologists, interested in the origins of the Germanic peoples, and, later, by Slavic archaeologists interested in the origins of the Slavs. The most important proponent of the thesis that specific traditions of material culture could be connected to linguistic groups was Gustaf Kossinna, who set about establishing the direct correspondence between early peoples and distinct material cultures. He believed himself capable of identifying ethnic groups—known first through classical and medieval texts, then identified by philology—by a systematic investigation of archaeological materials, an investigation that could trace peoples far beyond the historical period and into the Iron Age. Such distinctive ethnic markers gave a physical dimension to the linguistic parameters of ethnicity. Thus Kossinna posited a direct, one-to-one relationship between language, material culture, and peoples known from historical sources. Most important, it made it possible for Kossinna and his followers to trace the migration routes of early medieval peoples as they wandered from their original homelands into the Roman world.

The implications of this new tradition of ethnic archaeology were particularly important in the development of nineteenth- and twentieth-century territorial claims. In particular, it encouraged modern states such as Germany to claim regions of neighboring countries on the basis that these territories were the original homelands of the German peoples. Thus, the expansion of the German crusading orders into the east in the thirteenth century, or of the Third Reich in the twentieth, could be justified not as conquest but simply as a return. More recently, similar archaeological arguments have been used, for example, in conflicts between Hungarians and Slovenes, Albanians and Serbs, and Estonians and Germans.

The Toxic Waste

The heritage of nationalist philology and archaeology continues to weigh heavily on the map of European nations. They “scientifically” established the essential components of nationhood: language, territory, and distinct culture in an ancient past. Through the new history and the new philology, many believed that com-
mon unity could be established, ancient injustices could be nurtured, and ancient claims vindicated.

The stories are familiar enough to any student of Western European history. Germanic peoples, such as the Burgundians, the Goths, or the Lombards, living in southern Scandinavia, began to migrate south, driven by climatic change, famine, overpopulation, or some as-yet-unknown compulsion. These peoples moved across the whole length of Europe, taking their languages, customs, and traditions with them and transmitting their unique identities to their children, through generations of migration, until they found themselves on the borders of the Roman Empire. There, led by their heroic warrior-kings, descendants of ancient royal or noble families, they successfully challenged Rome and carved out Germanic kingdoms from the remains of the Empire. These heroes included the Ostrogoth Theodoric, descended from the ancient royal family of the Amals; Alaric, the Visigothic leader of the Balth dynasty; Alboin, commander of the Lombards and a member of the Gauti; and the Frank Clovis, a member of the Merovingian royal family. Slightly later, similar commanders of Slavic peoples, such as the Croatian family of Chrobatas and Ispethik, commander of Bulgars, led their peoples into the ruins of the Empire. These events were argued to have been the moments of “primary acquisition,” from which point began the history of the nations of Europe.

Today these events still offer the common basis for distinguishing the broad outlines of European ethnic groups. To be sure, not all these ethnic groups are still around, and even among those that are, not all are nation-states. Still, their leaders can aspire to nationhood and encourage their people to participate in the struggle for self-rule. The international community can offer no objections to these aspirations except for practicality, economic viability, or brute force—weak arguments in the face of deeply held convictions of the rights of peoples to self-determination.

But in spite of the emotional appeal of these historical and linguistic claims, nothing in the historical record justifies them. Congruence between early medieval and contemporary “peoples” is a myth. Linguistic and historical arguments break down quickly in contemporary issues of ethnic difference, and they are even less appropriate for distinguishing among the “peoples” of Europe in the early Middle Ages. In Northern Ireland, religion, not language, separates hostile parties. In the former Yugoslavia, Serbian and Croatian are dialects of the same language, one spoken by a traditionally Orthodox community, the other by a traditionally Roman Catholic one, although nationalist leadership in both actually comes from agnostic or atheistic political opportunists. Both in large, hegemonic states and in aspiring independence movements, claims that “we have always been a people” actually are appeals to become a people—appeals not grounded in history but, rather, attempts to create history. The past, as has often been said, is a foreign country, and we will never find ourselves there.

The Confusion of the Past

In Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, it is often hard to know just what languages differing “peoples” spoke; indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that they often spoke a variety of languages. At the same time, ancient and medieval observers often indicated that groups that they identified as different peoples shared a common language. Nor does language necessarily correspond to other cultural traditions, such as forms of dress, jewelry, pottery, or weapons. The hypothetical prehistoric maps of the major language groups—Germanic, Slavic, Celtic, Baltic, Romance, and the like—do not correspond to any specific differences in material culture that can be identified archaeologically. The simplistic maps of material cultures, elaborated by Kossinna and his followers, have
proved to be mythic: One by one the “distinguishing” characteristics of ethnic material culture have been shown to be much more or much less widely distributed than the patterns suggested by language. As the British historian Chris Wickham has remarked, “a man or woman with a Lombard-style brooch is no more necessarily a Lombard than a family in Bradford with a Toyota is Japanese; artifacts are no secure guide to ethnicity.”

Language apparently neither corresponded to nor determined culture. Political elites throughout history often have spoken languages quite different from those of their subordinates. Moreover, part of the conceptual problem of understanding the peoples of Europe in the early Middle Ages is that, following the model of nineteenth-century ethnic nationalism, historians are inclined to think geographically: They look for a correspondence between territories, regions, or kingdoms, and ethnic groups who occupied them. Just as in the case of modern, complex societies, however, the boundaries separating “peoples” in the early Middle Ages were usually not geographical but political, economic, or social. Moreover, where geographic distinctions did exist, these were within areas, not between areas.

The populations of towns in Gaul, Spain, Italy, and the Balkans were distinct from the populations in the surrounding countryside. Townspeople comprised military officers and government officials from across the Empire, merchants from Syria and Asia Minor, and Jews who had lived for generations in these outposts of Mediterranean society. In the sixth century, Paris, for example, had a series of bishops whose names suggest their origins from the eastern Mediterranean, an indication that control of this central religious institution may have been in the hands of the Syrian and Greek communities. At the same time, indigenous aristocrats continued to dominate the countryside. The arrival of Goths, Burgundians, and Franks did little to change this situation. Archaeological evidence had shown that the barbarians, like the governors and military commanders they replaced, settled primarily in towns where they could maintain political control through unity, while they lived on the revenues collected from the estates assigned to them. Outside the towns, barbarian forces limited their actual settlements to strategic military sites.

Later barbarian settlements reversed this pattern. In the Balkans, cities—particularly those along the coast, such as Zadar, Trogir, Split, Dubrovnik, Budva, and Kotor—remained Greek-speaking outposts of Roman culture. The surrounding rural population was dominated by a steppe confederation, known as the Avars, which eventually merged into Slavic societies. German expansion into northeastern Europe likewise created cities that had little in common—culturally, politically, or linguistically—with the surrounding countryside they controlled.

These medieval patterns were long lasting. Well into the twentieth century, important cities, such as those in the Baltics, remained culturally, linguistically, and politically distinct from the surrounding countryside without creating “national” tensions. On the other hand, language that might, at first glance, be understood in terms of ethnic difference often simply implied social or political distinction. In the nineteenth century, when Estonian peasants referred to saaks (Saxons), the word meant primarily “lord” or “master,” not “German” in some ethnic, linguistic, nationalistic sense. Over the long term, peoples simply do not map geographically.

Only the horrors of the twentieth century have created the illusion that language and ethnicity could or should be mapable. Suppression of cultural diversity in states such as Spain, France, and Turkey made Basques, Catalans, Britons, Armenians, Kurds, and other minorities “disappear” from nation-states. The Holocaust and the “ethnic cleansing” of Eastern Europe that followed World War II drove thousands of German-speaking inhabitants of Eastern Europe west, and made the populations of cities such as Danzig, Königsberg, Riga, and Vilna largely the same as the sur-
rounding rural populations for the first time in their histories. However, there are signs that the older pattern of stratified linguistic and cultural diversity is re-emerging. This is particularly evident in the great cities of Europe, where linguistic and cultural stratification once more characterizes both ends of the population’s spectrum. At the top, major multinational corporations and scientific institutions operate largely or entirely in English with little regard for local language traditions. At the lower end of the social scale, these cities have experienced substantial growth in the numbers of people who trace their origins to Turkey, North Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and other parts of Asia. These immigrants live their lives speaking Arabic, Turkish, and other languages distant from those spoken by the middle class. These developments, which are greeted by hostility and fear as novel occurrences, are actually a return to a much more ancient pattern of ethnic diversity. Europe is indeed beginning once more to resemble its past.

Thus, after almost two centuries of attempts to map ethnicity linguistically, archaeologically, and historically, one must conclude that all of these programs have failed. The fundamental reason is that ethnicity exists first and last in people’s minds. Yet ethnicity’s locus in people’s minds does not make it ephemeral; on the contrary, it is all the more real and powerful as a result. A creation of the human will, it is impervious to mere rational disproof.

And yet, in fairness to nineteenth- and twentieth-century scientific nationalists, the categories of nationhood they developed did not spring from a void: They drew on a much more ancient tradition of identifying peoples, a tradition already developed in the very historical sources that historians and philologists attempted to use to find peoples in the past. In many significant ways, nineteenth-century ethnography was but a continuation, with more refined tools, of the ethnographic tradition of Classical Antiquity.

Chapter Two

Imagining Peoples in Antiquity

It is all very well to point out, as we did in Chapter 1, that ethnic nationalism is of recent origin. It would be more accurate to say that the particular type of ethnic nationalism that we know today is of recent origin. In past ages, people had different but equally powerful ways of identifying themselves, distinguishing themselves from others, and mobilizing these identities for political purposes. However, we often have difficulty recognizing the differences between these earlier ways of perceiving group identities and more contemporary attitudes because, again, we are trapped in the very historical process we are attempting to study. Already we have used the terms “people,” “ethnicity,” “race,” and “ethnogenesis,” as though these words carried some sort of objective, fixed meaning. While the particular way that we use them is novel, these words and their equivalents have a long history reaching back at least to the fifth century B.C.E. They are inherited from several millennia of discussions, observations, and assumptions and thus come to us burdened with the cultural baggage of the past. Long before Fichte or Herder, these terms were important and resonant elements in the Western European intellectual tradition.