

Prehistory and the Construction of a European Identity in German History Textbooks Today

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Introduction

Prehistory and archaeology have often been used to establish a national identity through the political interpretation of finds and ancient cultures. Some well-known examples are the French recourse to the Celts, the Spanish identification with the Celtiberians and the German exploitation of ancient Germanic history in the 19th/20th century. Ideas that shaped national identity were, in these epochs, put in schoolbooks in order to contribute to pupils' education and to influence their conception of the world (Marienfeld, 1979; Ruiz-Zapatero & Alvarez-Sanchís, 1995). In Germany this phenomenon found its peak during the time of National Socialism. The textbooks spread ideas based on race and glorified the very ancient German past, referring (among other things) to prehistoric archaeology (Hassmann, 2002; Marienfeld, 1979).

How is history presented today? A broad analysis of German textbooks shows evidence to the fact that prehistoric and antique times are still used for political education. But the ideas have changed: 'Multi-ethnicity', 'European identity' and 'open borders' are the ideas that are taught today. The "growing together of Europe" and the "meeting of different cultures" have become new key concepts in the German school curricula, especially in the subjects history and politics.

The following examples show how these ideals influence the content of today's schoolbooks. These examples are taken from an analysis of 47 history books that are presently being used in German schools. They were written for pupils in their first year of history classes at secondary school. Depending on the Bundesland (Federal State) and the school type, this corresponds to the 5th, 6th or 7th form. I have examined the chapters on prehistoric and archaeological topics within the framework of my doctoral thesis in archaeology. My perspective and critique are therefore archaeological, not didactical or pedagogical.

This contribution will proceed chronologically, from the time of the first humans, through the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, the time of the Celts, and up to the Romans in the provinces north of the Alps. The text will concentrate on examples referring to political identity in the sense of multi-ethnicity, European identity and open borders. Please note that these ideas are only one part of other political and social ideals that one can find in chapters about prehistory. The concept of gender and family in schoolbook texts and illustrations for example, or the construction of regional or national identity, with the help of archaeology, are other topics of major interest not

discussed in this article (see Sénécheau, 2005; Sénécheau in print). Quotations from these books will be translated into English, but the original texts are in German.

Evolution of man: teaching multi-ethnicity

Traditional illustrations of evolution almost always show white people with a human of the European type standing at the end of the development (e.g. Cornelsen, 1994, 17). These pictures with one kind of human walking behind the other in the schoolbooks are usually based on scientific models from the 1960s (e.g. Howell, 1969, 42-45). It is due to new scientific trends that some of the recent German history textbooks show pictures of early humans as being black (e.g. Schroedel 2001, 12). The books also explain that evolution has led to different races, types and colours all over the world (e.g. Cornelsen, 2000, 24f.). Charts on this subject often illustrate the origin of modern man in Africa and his spreading over the entire world (e.g. Westermann, 2001a, 69). The message of most of the new pictures and charts is: 'We all have a common origin. We are all the same. And at the very beginning, we were all black.' One title of a schoolbook chapter even says: "In fact, we are all Africans ..." (Schöningh, 1998, 22).

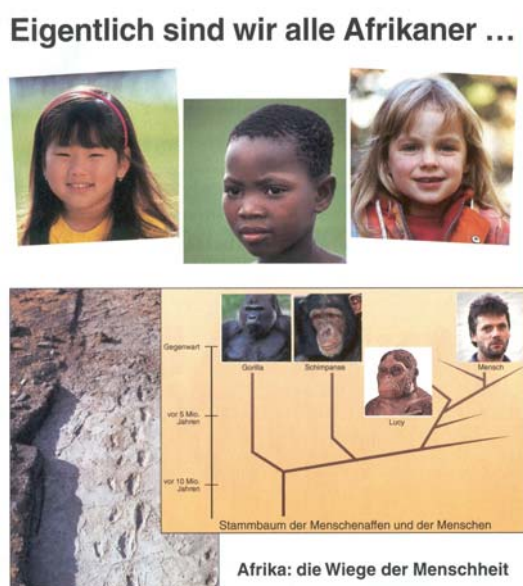


Figure 1. "In fact, we are all Africans...".
The subtitle says: "Africa, origin of mankind" (Schöningh, 1998, 22).

Some of the scientists contradict this "Out-of-Africa" model and believe that homo sapiens could have developed separately in different places of the world ("multi-regional" model, see Auffermann & Orschiedt, 2002, 28f.). The schoolbooks studied

usually don't mention this disagreement among anthropologists. This is certainly not only due to the fact that the material would otherwise be too complicated. I believe that the "Out-of-Africa" model is more suited to a concept that aims to educate pupils today to be cosmopolitan, against racism and for a global world in which skin colour is not to play a role.

In contrast to the ideals that the new illustrations about the evolution of man convey, there are chapters or pictures intending to show that there are people who, "even today", live like in the Stone Age. Corresponding to keywords given in the curricula, peoples such as the Aborigines, the Papuans, the Bambuti or the Pygmies are frequently presented and characterized as modern-day Stone Age cultures – as if they had remained at this "stage of development" (e.g. Westermann, 1994, 40f.; Oldenbourg, 1992, 26). In one schoolbook you can even read the term "cave inhabitants" to describe a people from the Philippines in comparison to Neanderthal man shown as 'cave man' (Schöningh, 1995, 16f.). There is one example of a page in a schoolbook that deals with the topic critically and, in my opinion, correctly (Buchner, 2001, 22): "Are these peoples testimony to the Stone Age?" the text asks, and answers: "No." It explains that indigenous peoples have a history in the course of which they repeatedly adapted to new living conditions. In fact, the tools they use are not a sign of primitiveness. They live in complex social systems, they have their myths and their religion. They do not "remain" in the Stone Age, they are living today. In my opinion, the authors of curricula and of the schoolbooks should give up this tradition of looking to the indigenous peoples in history teaching. This subject could be very interesting in geography classes without assessing any "stage of development".

"Frozen Fritz" and the "European nation"

Traditionally, for the later epochs after the Palaeolithic Age, German schoolbooks present almost exclusively archaeological finds from Germany or from certain German regions. But there is one important topic which makes an exception: In 1991 there was an important find at the border between Austria and Italy, not far from Switzerland – the Iceman, also known as "Frozen Fritz", in German "Ötzi". He is mentioned in every new schoolbook.

It is interesting to note how the question of his origin is answered in one text example (Cornelsen, 2000, 18): "Who was Ötzi?" the authors ask, and they present a description of a man. The text states that origin and place of birth of the man are unknown. However, the next key words are "nationality: European". The motive for this classification is understandable: after the discovery there was a great argument concerning which nation, Austria or Italy, the Iceman belonged to, who had the right to examine him and to display him in a museum (Fleckinger & Steiner, 2003, 10-26). When the location was finally declared to be South Tyrol, and thus Italy, they agreed that a European team of experts was to study the mummy in Austria and that it would then be displayed in a museum in South Tyrol. The fact that the find is called "European" in the schoolbooks shows that these disagreements should not

play such an important role, and that it was a find of such importance that all Europeans could identify with it.

However, apart from the fact that even today there is no "European" nation, such a procedure is absolutely anachronistic. Nations did not appear until the 19th century, over 5,000 years after the Iceman's lifetime. *He* knew nothing about nationalities. In my opinion this example shows that the authors of schoolbooks made "Ötzi" into a European because they were searching for a European identity that they could convey to the pupils.¹

Trade in the Bronze Age: parallels to the European (trade) Community?

Europe also serves as an important place of reference for the "Metal Ages". For example, one of the schoolbooks shows a chart with the title "Europe in the Bronze Age" (Klett, 1994, 31). The chart illustrates deposits of copper, tin, and amber and especially the presumed trade routes. The title of the accompanying text reads "Contacts to other peoples via trade" and is followed by the words: "Proper trade routes developed that the traders travelled along to exchange their goods (...). The profession of the trader was interesting but also very dangerous (...). Besides his wares, he brought news of other peoples and regions with him, so that now the people learned more from each other."

People learn from each other, trade binds – that sounds very much like a policy suited to the European Community. It is certainly true that in the Bronze Age the exchange in the broader sense was increased because of the increased trade. However, at that time Europe did not yet exist as a single market, and trade did not stop at the borders of Europe like on this map. Behind the map there is a Eurocentred view that exaggerates the importance of Europe. But it is not only a view of the schoolbook authors. Up until today the scientific community itself has been producing such maps, and the problem still exists that research is limited by artificial borders that do not correspond to the situation in the past (when finds made in another country are not accessible or the language and therefore the literature of the neighbouring country are difficult to understand).

Iron Age: European unity by Celtic culture?

"Celts, Romans, early Germans – our ancestors in Europe" is the title of a schoolbook chapter dealing with topics of the Iron Age and Roman civilisation north of the Alps (Oldenbourg, 1998, 4f.). As members of these nations, illustrations of "married couples" – the German text says "Ehepaare" – are presented, affixed to a map of Europe. The Celts are often used to claim an early cultural unity in Europe. This "oldest people of Europe" was said to have spread out from its original region on the Danube and the Rhine, bringing its language and culture as far as Asia, Spain, and Ireland (charts e.g. in bsv 1992, 28; Diesterweg, 2001, 32). In some of the

¹ The editor was informed about the problem and changed the personal description in the following editions.

textbooks they are said to have left their traces everywhere, especially in regions like Brittany, Wales, Ireland and Scotland, in the form of "Celtic traditions". Sagas, myths, heroic tales, the Celtic languages like Gaelic and Irish as well as Celtic names of rivers and places are mentioned (e.g. Klett, 2000, 32; Schroedel, 2000, 39). The message of these schoolbook pages is that present-day commonalities of some European regions are the result of a common history that stretches back into the Iron Age. From a present-day scientific standpoint, this is absolutely wrong.

First of all, one should not, like in one example, choose Stonehenge of all places as a symbol for Celtic culture (Cornelsen, 2001, 47). The Megalithic cultures are relicts of the Neolithic period and have no connection with the Celts who lived nearly 2,000 years later. This popular cliché has existed since the Romantic era, when Celtic Druids and Megalithic monuments were erroneously associated with each other (Baum in Zimmer, 2004, 28). So-called Celtic sagas and myths were first written down in the Middle Ages and much later misleadingly called Celtic (Rieckhoff & Biel, 2001, 14f.). About 1,000 years lie between the historic Celts and the written records of such sagas. The concept "Celtic languages" is also misleading: the term "Celtic" for this group of languages originates in the 18th century. It is the result of a misinterpretation of modern Bretonic which was then falsely thought to be the remnants of the language of the Celts who had lived in Gaul (Chapman, 1992, 70-75). There is however no linguistic continuity from the Celts until today. "Celtic traditions" are a product of the modern times, times in which people are searching for an identity and in which tour operators need good clichés in order to make holiday areas more attractive for tourists – today's Celtic music or the quilt have no connection with the archaeological Celts (Maier, 2000, 250ff.). On closer consideration, the cultural unity of the Iron Age is seen to be cultural diversity. Archaeological concepts like the Hallstatt and Latène culture reveal themselves to be artificial, meant to facilitate communication about archaeological material among the scientists (Collis, 2003). The "Celts" probably never existed as a unit, as a "people", neither according to the historical nor to the archaeological sources (Rieckhoff & Biel, 2001, 15f.; Chapman, 1992). From a scientific standpoint, they are therefore hardly suited to be a foundation for the creation of a united European identity.

The end of National Socialism also brought the end of the identification of the Germans with the early Germans in schoolbooks. Today, they are only sporadically referred to as "our ancestors" like in the example given above, where they are named with Celts and Romans together (Oldenbourg, 1998, 4f.).

The "Roman roots of Europe"

For the purpose of a didactic justification of the lessons on the Roman Empire, the curricula introduce certain teaching goals which combine the keywords "Roman culture" and "Europe". Thus the pupils are to learn, for example, that the Roman civilisation "was of great importance for the common European culture", they are to gain an "insight into the importance of Roman culture and civilisation for Europe "

and they are to become aware of the "Roman roots of Europe" (curriculum for 'Gymnasium' in Baden-Württemberg 1994, 156). At the end of the chapter on Roman history, the schoolbooks now act on these ideas by looking for traces of Roman culture in the present and in one's surroundings (with a special relationship to Europe e.g. Klett, 1999, 128f.). These can be: old Roman buildings and finds, examples of modern architecture which was influenced by Roman buildings, examples from law, the Latin alphabet and Latin numerals, the Latin language etc.

The Latin language is quite frequently used as an element that binds Europe. One example of a schoolbook page has the title "Latin – the language of Europe" (Buchner, 2002, 167). Words from different Romanic languages are compared. There is a map of Europe in the background. It is obvious that ancient Rome still has a great influence on our culture and history. This is not to be questioned here. And it is equally clear that Latin is a language that has influenced many other languages that are spoken in Europe today. But is it the language of Europe? It is also the language of Latin America. And it is not the language of some countries in Eastern Europe. It is only partly the language of Germany by virtue of many linguistic borrowings. The European languages have different roots, and this is not stated here. In my opinion, this example shows that the schoolbook authors are, for political and pedagogical reasons, desperately trying to create a unity where it in fact does not exist. They want to force European unity and for this purpose they are using the example of language which is not necessarily suitable.

Ancient Rome and the European Community



Figure 2. The Roman "Denarius" and the "Euro".

The title says "Roman antiquity and European present" (Cornelsen 2000, 195).

Analysing the textbooks of the recent years, one can find the increasing tendency to compare the Roman Empire to the European Community (e.g. Buchner 2001, 183). In one case, the Roman 'Denarius' is interpreted as an early type of the 'Euro' (Cornelsen, 2000, 195) (fig. 2). The text under the illustrations speaks of the advantages of a single market for trade: that the people in the Roman Empire could trade at stable prices with each other regardless of borders and that the goods were bought and sold within a wide-reaching trading network. Naturally this lends itself

to a comparison with the European Community. However there is a catch: in the cultures of those times, which mainly traded without the use of coins, the standardised monetary system was only a simplification for those who used it. And especially the Celtic and German cultures used coins in a way other than the Romans (Todd, 2000, 94f.). Trade connections existed long before – for example for important raw materials already in the Palaeolithic Age, several thousands of years earlier. Besides, borders in those times did not have the separating importance that today's national borders have, and trade "across borders" can therefore hardly be compared with the present-day situation (Whittaker, 1994).

Romans and early Germans at the Limes

This part of the contribution is about how, under the influence of pedagogical principles and a new historical view, the interpretation of the relationship between Romans and the Germanic people at the Limes, the border separating the Roman conquered land from the Germanic regions, has developed during the last 10 years. What was in earlier interpretations a place of violent conflict and a defence against the Germanic peoples, a line separating German tribes and Romans, has become a line where trade and cultural exchange took place. Pictures showing war and battles between Romans and German tribes at the Limes belong to an older generation of schoolbooks and have become rare (e.g. Klett, 1995a, 187f.) – today it is important to convey a picture of the peaceful co-existence of Romans and German tribes. In the following, this change will be illustrated by a series of Limes reconstructions from different schoolbooks.

Early reconstructions show a border fortification that is drawn endlessly through the landscape. There is no opening in the wall that could be passed through – the border is long and closed (e.g. Klett, 1994, 66) (fig. 3). Reconstructions like these go back to scientific models from the 1920s.

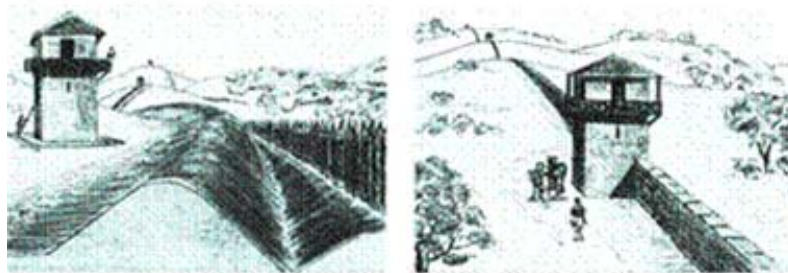


Figure 3. The Limes as a long and closed border (Klett 1994, 66).

In an early further development of this pattern, the Limes is still drawn a long distance through the landscape, but the illustration shows something new: a passage (bsv, 1995, 150). It is guarded by three soldiers. They are standing there although at this moment no one wants to cross the border.

In a next step the Limes is running over many hills, and a passage is guarded by soldiers (e.g. Cornelsen, 1994, 168). A horse-drawn wagon and two horsemen want to leave the Roman Empire. In the pictures of this type from the 1990s, people are always leaving the empire, but almost never does anyone set foot on the empire passing by way of the Limes in the other direction. This might be a coincidence, perhaps an illustrator once began this way and the others imitated the scenes. It is however also possible that a special historical view is depicted here: the interpretation of the border as protection from intruders or invaders, and the idea of Romans as conquerors or bringing culture over to the neighbouring, 'uncivilised' regions. The pattern of the illustration remains basically the same in the next step. There are the Limes with the tower, and again a trader leaving the Roman territory (Klett, 1995b, 248). But the soldier is no longer standing in the immediate area of the gate but at the base of the tower. He just observes the trader passing by.

In a still newer illustration people are – and this is new – passing in both directions (Volk und Wissen, 1998, 158). It was made in 1998 for the pupils of the new Federal States in the eastern part of Germany. The title of the corresponding text says: "The Limes binds Romans and early Germans" (Volk und Wissen, 1998, 161). Further on we read: "In times of peace the Limes was passable. How did the people take advantage of their freedom at the border? At the Limes and in the Roman legion cities, markets were held regularly." And in the following the authors write about travellers moving in both directions.



Figure 4. The Limes as a "meeting place" (Klett, 1999, 101).

In a picture from 1999, the Limes is practically unguarded (Klett, 1999, 100f.) (fig. 4). There is traffic in both directions, and trade. It is a very peaceful scene, and its effect is heightened by the use of very friendly colours. The title of the schoolbook chapter is: "Meeting place Limes: Even the might of Rome had its limits, it ended at the Limes. However, the border did not only separate Romans and Germanic tribes, it was also a meeting place." And there is an illustration of a Roman bridge at the bottom of the page which thus becomes a symbol of a bond between the peoples.

In another picture from the year 1999 you can again see the usual components of the Limes illustrations (Westermann, 2001b, 118): palisade through the landscape, tower, and soldiers. The soldiers are talking with each other in a friendly way. The main part of the illustration is in the foreground where Romans and Germans are trading with each other. Everyone is cheerful, and the children are playing together. The title of the entire chapter is: "Living together at Limes", the title of the picture: "Meeting place Limes".

One can find a similar situation in a schoolbook from 2001 (Klett-Perthes, 2001, 156-159): The title of the whole teaching unit is "Romans and early Germans – neighbours at the Limes"; the chapter about trade is called "Trade in the protection of the Limes" and shows a picture with "A Market at the Limes".

From a "bastion against the barbarians" to a "meeting place of the cultures". This change has nothing to do with adapting the historical view to new scientific discoveries – when archaeologists do excavations at the Limes, they always find the same things, roughly speaking: a ditch, a wall or earthwork, sometimes an opening and a tower. Anything else we can see in the illustrations is added to give the pupils a more vivid picture of what might have happened at these places. And this addition is a mirror for images of the past influenced by modern ideas. Of course, there has also been a change in the scientific interpretation of the Limes during the last years. But in the scientific community, the researchers speak of border regions or border corridors on both sides of the Limes and do not see it any longer as a selective "demarcation line" (Whittaker, 1994). The schoolbooks still depict a border line, only what is happening right next to this border has changed. These changes in the textbooks are indicative, in my opinion, of the changes and new understanding of inner-European borders in the present-day society. Today we want open border politics, peace and cultural exchange. This is the message that the pictures convey to the pupils. And it is surely no coincidence that economy and trade play an increasingly important role in these illustrations. The pictures reveal more about the respective society in which they were produced than about historical reality.

Ancient Rome as a "melting pot of people"

The fact that recent textbooks also emphasise the character of the Roman Empire as a 'melting pot of people and nations' and discuss the integration of different cultures and religions must also be seen as an answer to present-day problems. The key words are 'multi-ethnicity' then and now. This is especially obvious in schoolbooks for combined history and social studies. Recently they have been combining the ancient world and the modern with reference to topics like migration and integration or coexistence of different cultures (see fig. 5).

In one of the textbooks the title for the teaching unit (Klett, 1999) says: "Rome: many peoples in one empire". Three subsequent chapters of the teaching unit are titled: "They were all Romans. The living together of peoples in the Roman Empire", "People from other parts of the world also live among us", "Being a foreigner in Germany. It is sometimes not easy to be a foreigner". The introductory

text about the teaching unit explains: "Rome finally became a large empire in which many different peoples lived together. This was not always easy. And how is it today with us? People with different origins also live here. How do we deal with this? You can get answers to these questions in this chapter" (Klett, 1999, 90).



Figure 5. Illustration showing inhabitants of the Germanic provinces and Romans from Italy under the title "They were all Romans" (Klett, 1999, 107).

In another example the chapter "Romans and early Germans – neighbours at the Limes" is followed by the teaching unit "We live together with people from other cultural backgrounds" (Klett-Perthes, 2001; similar: Schroedel, 1999). A third book compares the foreigners' possibilities of obtaining the citizenship in ancient Rome and in Germany today (Westermann, 2001b, 125).

Typically, it is more the similarities between the situations in ancient times and today that are sought, than the differences – which were in fact considerable. This is why historians do not necessarily view the comparison as suitable.

Conclusion

Most of the examples presented in this article are well-suited to the direction in which German educational policy wants its pupils to be educated: modern history lessons are expected to teach important values like tolerance and openness and they are supposed to develop the pupils' ability for democratic participation. The pupils are to become citizens of a multi-ethnic world and of a European Community with open borders. From our political and ethical point of view today, this is an approach of which we all approve. But answering the question whether history textbooks still use prehistory and archaeology to establish political identity, we have to state: Yes – only the ideas have changed. And these changes are not only to be seen as new scientific results. Rather, they are a mirror of our society and show how present-day questions and problems influence our interpretation and presentation of prehistory – even today.

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