

# The Orient of Europe



The Orient of Europe:  
The Mythical Image of India and Competing  
Images of German National Identity

By

Nicholas A. Germana

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P U B L I S H I N G

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To Leslie, Lara, and Dylan



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## INTRODUCTION

If the regeneration of the human species started in the East, Germany must be considered the Orient of Europe.

—August Wilhelm Schlegel<sup>1</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century, German orientalist scholars had come to be seen as “the Indians of Europe.”<sup>2</sup> In the latter half of the century, two of the most prominent Indologists in all of Europe were Friedrich Max Müller, who taught Sanskrit at Oxford, and Friedrich Nietzsche’s close friend Paul Deussen, who published highly influential works on the Vedanta and Indian mythology. By the early twentieth century, Indian philosophy and symbolism had become widely diffused throughout German culture. Theosophists and racialists helped to popularize notions about the “Aryan race,”<sup>3</sup> and Buddhist societies and journals bearing the swastika and other Vedic Indian iconography gained numerous members and subscribers.<sup>4</sup>

The growth of Indology and popular interest in India by Germans is remarkable considering the relatively late start they got compared to the British and French. Academic Indology had begun in those countries in the late eighteenth century as a result of imperial interests in South Asia. The most influential of the early orientalists were philologists. In France, Abraham Anquetil-Duperron rendered Latin translations of the Persian *Zend-Avesta* (1771) and the Sanskrit *Upanishads* (1787; 1801 in French). In Britain, the pioneering work was done by Charles Wilkins, who translated the *Bhagavad-Gita* into English in 1785, and Sir William Jones, who translated several important works into English, most notably the

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<sup>1</sup> August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Geschichte der romantischen Literatur in Kritische Schriften und Briefe*, Vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1965), 37.

<sup>2</sup> Foucher de Careil, *Hegel et Schopenhauer* (1862), cited in Roger-Pol Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness: The Philosophers and the Buddha*, trans. David Streight and Pamela Vohnson (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 102.

<sup>3</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1934), 89-90.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas T. McGetchin, *The Sanskrit Reich: Translating Ancient India for Modern Germans, 1790-1914* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2002), 222-224.

drama *Śakuntalā* (1789), by the playwright Kalidasa, who came to be regarded as the “Indian Shakespeare.” Both Jones and Wilkins were founding members of the Royal Asiatic Society of Calcutta, an institution founded at the behest of Governor-General Warren Hastings to uncover and explore all aspects of Indian culture in an effort to administer the empire there more effectively. The works of this collection of scholars and imperial officials entered wide circulation through their published proceedings, the *Asiatic Researches*.<sup>5</sup>

When German scholars became interested in these new findings, they had to go through the works of their French and English predecessors. In 1790, Georg Forster translated *Śakuntalā* into German, accompanied by his own copious explanatory notes. However, since Forster had no knowledge of Sanskrit, he translated the play from Jones’ English version. The play had an enormous impact, as will be seen in several of the following chapters, especially those concerned with Johann Gottfried Herder, Novalis, and Friedrich Schlegel. In the mid-1790s, Herder also translated fragments of the *Bhagavad-Gita* into German, but once again the original source was the English translation. It wasn’t until just after the turn of the century, in 1802, when a German scholar would take up the study of Sanskrit first-hand. In that year Friedrich Schlegel traveled to Paris to study Persian, and ended up studying Sanskrit under the British naval officer and Asiatic Society member Alexander Hamilton. His brother, August Wilhelm Schlegel, and Franz Bopp made the same trip eleven years later. It was not until the late 1810s that eager young German orientalists were able to train for their careers at a German university. The fact that academic Indology wasn’t even really established in German universities until the third decade of the nineteenth century makes its rise to prominence by just after mid-century appear that much more meteoric.

One measure of the success of Sanskrit Studies and Indology in Germany is the number of academic chairs established at universities devoted to these emerging fields. Between 1818 and 1914, thirteen chairs were established in Sanskrit Studies and related fields. Significantly, the first six such appointments were made in Prussia between A.W. Schlegel’s appointment at Bonn in 1818 and 1840. More than half of the total number of appointments in these fields in all of Germany, seven, were made at Prussian universities.<sup>6</sup> While these are not overwhelming

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<sup>5</sup> See Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe’s Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984 [originally published in French, 1950]), 51-57.

<sup>6</sup> McGetchin, 145.

numbers, they nevertheless point to successful growth of Indology in Germany, and indicate a particular interest in Indological studies on the part of the Prussian government. As will be seen in Chapter Five, this seemingly curious interest in Prussia is attributable to a number of factors, including both imperial and academic politics.

The reasons for French and British interest in Indian literature and culture are clear. The British governors in India recognized the key role the Indians' own legal, philosophical, and religious traditions could play in the efficient administration of the empire over such large numbers of people. This nativist approach, advocated by the so-called 'Orientalists,' was bitterly opposed by the 'Anglicists,' who argued for the imposition of modern, rational, British legal codes throughout the empire. This latter group took its philosophical inspiration from James Mill's Utilitarian principles. Even though French political and economic interests did not have much time to develop, French missionaries had become deeply entrenched in India. It was, in fact, largely thanks to the works of Jesuit missionaries that the earliest Sanskrit texts were uncovered and preserved.<sup>7</sup>

There were no comparable links between Germany and India. Even prior to the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, when one could technically speak of a Germany, political or economic ties with Asia were for the most part restricted to Austrian engagement with Ottoman Turks. There were few notable excursions by Germans to South Asia (one interesting exception to this rule was August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel's older brother Karl), and most of the information that was available to them about India came from the recordings of Dutch missionaries.<sup>8</sup>

The question of German interest in India, especially in the early years, is a perplexing one. Edward Said confessed that it was unclear how exactly Germany fit into his model. In the Introduction to *Orientalism*, he stated that "at no time in German scholarship during the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century could a close partnership have developed between Orientalists and a protracted, sustained *national* interest in the Orient." He continued, however, to try to define what constituted the importance of German Orientalism within the larger European framework: "What German Oriental scholarship did was to refine and elaborate techniques whose application was to texts, myths, ideas, and languages almost literally gathered from the Orient by imperial Britain and France."<sup>9</sup> He

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<sup>7</sup> Schwab, 28-33.

<sup>8</sup> A. Leslie Willson, *A Mythical Image: The Ideal of India in German Romanticism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1964), 8-22.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 19.

concluded: “Yet what German Orientalism had in common with Anglo-French and later American Orientalism was a kind of intellectual *authority* over the Orient within Western culture. This authority must in large part be the subject of any description of Orientalism, and it is so in this study.”<sup>10</sup> This claim about the German role in the Orientalist project was not, however, elaborated upon in the text that followed.

In 1986, Said’s essay “Orientalism Reconsidered” (originally delivered as an address at a conference at the University of Sussex) addressed some of the criticisms that were leveled at his work. Again he directly addressed the question of German Orientalism, but in an even more puzzling way:

I have grasped some of the problems and answers proposed by some of my critics, and because they strike me as useful in focusing an argument, these are the ones I shall be taking into account in the comments that follow. Others – like my exclusion of German Orientalism, which no one has given any reason for me to have *included* – have frankly struck me as superficial or trivial, and there seems no point in even responding to them.<sup>11</sup>

This deflection is remarkable in the face of his statement about the existence of German Orientalism from his book, and the prominence of Indology in Germany in the nineteenth century, reflected to no small degree by the fact that it was a German scholar, Max Müller, who became the first chair of Sanskrit at Oxford (1861). In his recent major critical examination of *Orientalism*, Daniel Martin Varisco rightly concludes that “[a] frustrated critic might wonder if Said omitted German Orientalism precisely to highlight the complicity of the academic discourse with imperialism on the ground à la France and Britain.”<sup>12</sup>

Some scholars who have been influenced by Said have, however, turned their attention in the direction of Germany. Seen through the lens of Said’s model, such statements as the one cited at the beginning of this Introduction are seen as an indication that Germans harbored a desire to ‘colonize’ the East intellectually, in order to make up for the fact that, unlike the British, they were unable to do so militarily. Edwin Bryant, for example, argues that comparative philology “offered certain German scholars an opportunity to compensate for their poor showing on the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Said, “Orientalism Reconsidered,” *Orientalism: A Reader*, ed. Alexander Lyon Macfie (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 346.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Martin Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: Said and Unsaid* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 90.

colonial scene.”<sup>13</sup> Kamakshi Murti has also argued that German academic orientalism was the product of the desire to identify Germany with the imperial domination of the West over the East, and over India in particular.<sup>14</sup> Most scholars who treat the subject of German Orientalism (in the Saidian sense of the term, signified by the capital letter at the beginning) locate such imperial aims in the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries. Sheldon Pollock, for example, puts an interesting spin on the idea by proposing that in this later period we can observe German Orientalism turned inward, i.e. toward domination of Europe.<sup>15</sup> Few have argued that German imperialist interests or desires existed before the late eighteenth century, at the earliest. Suzanne Zantop alone argued that German “colonial fantasies” date back to the seventeenth century, but her argument pertains to the Americas and Africa, not the Orient.<sup>16</sup> More recently, Todd Kontje has made the case for a plurality of German Orientalisms extending from the early eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth.<sup>17</sup>

Few scholars, however, attempt to account for the explicit *identification* with the Orient expressed in Schlegel’s quote, as well as elsewhere in the Romantic orientalist literature.<sup>18</sup> As a model for emulation, India and the Orient found their most serious competitor in the *Bildungsbürger’s* fascination with all things Hellenic. During the period of trial and tribulation, the image of ancient Greece also had considerable utility. In *Down from Olympus*, Suzanne Marchand explains early nineteenth century German philhellenism in part by the experience of political and military humiliation at the hands of the French during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: “[D]uring the darkest hours of the Revolutionary Wars, German identification with the Athenian Empire –

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<sup>13</sup> Edwin Bryant, *The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 29.

<sup>14</sup> Kamakshi P. Murti, *India: The Seductive and Seduced “Other” of German Orientalism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood press, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> Pollock, Sheldon, “Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power beyond the Raj”, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament – Perspectives on South Asia*, eds. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> Suzanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies. Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770-1870* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>17</sup> Todd Kontje, *German Orientalisms* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the ‘Orient’ in this quote will be assumed to be India for reasons that will be made clear in the course of the chapters on the Schlegel brothers.

politically fragmented, conquered by force of arms, but united by a single language and spirit – became much more palpable.”<sup>19</sup> Brian Vick has provided this insight on the importance of Greece for German intellectuals:

The basic assumption was that there was something special about the Germans that destined them to be the preeminent clearing house for the spiritual goods of the world’s great cultures, above all the Greeks, but more broadly was well. This mission even had a certain redemptive quality, one that particularly engaged classical philologists, for the Germans of their day were to succeed in fusing the legacies of Greco-Roman antiquity and the Christian-Teutonic Middle Ages into a new, modern phase of world history.<sup>20</sup>

However, as will be seen in Chapter Four, it was the legacy of the Indic Orient that many German intellectuals sought to fuse with that of the “Christian-Teutonic Middle Ages,” especially during the years of struggle against Napoleon and French power; classical philologists were, as a rule, much more cynical about efforts to glorify the German Middle Ages.

The German fascination for the Greeks is as well documented as it is undeniable.<sup>21</sup> However, what hasn’t been sufficiently noted is the fact that some of the most prominent German philhellenes turned their attention increasingly toward India in the decades from the 1790s to the 1820s. The Schlegel brothers and Wilhelm von Humboldt all began their literary and professional careers as devotees of ancient Greek culture before turning to ancient Indian philosophy and literature. Classical philology, focusing on Greek and Latin, was established in Germany by F.A. Wolf at Halle in 1787 under the name *Altertumswissenschaft*. Comparative philology, grounded in the study of Sanskrit and its relationship to other Indo-European languages, was founded a generation later with the publication of Bopp’s *Conjugationssystem der Sanskrit* in 1816. A.W. Schlegel

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<sup>19</sup> Suzanne Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750-1970* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 24-25.

<sup>20</sup> “Greek Origins and Organic Metaphors: Ideals of Cultural Autonomy in Neohumanist Germany from Winckelmann to Curtius,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* (July 2002, Vol. 63, No. 3), 495-96.

<sup>21</sup> The classic remains Edith Butler’s *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935). See also Irntraut Sahmland, *Christoph Martin Wieland und die Deutsche Nation: Zwischen Patriotismus, Kosmopolitanismus und Griechentum* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1990), and Dieter Sturma, “Politics and the New Mythology: The turn to late Romanticism,” *Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).



became the first scholar to teach Sanskrit in Germany at the University of Bonn in 1818. In other words, classical and comparative philology underwent institutionalization in German universities within a generation of each other, and in the cash-strapped years following the Wars of Liberation they had to compete with one another for increasingly rare state resources.<sup>22</sup>

One of the few scholars to recognize the significance of German identification with colonized peoples was Susanne Zantop. In her book *Colonial Fantasies*, she saw German intellectuals as identifying with various colonized peoples as a response to their own political and military weakness in contrast to the French, a sentiment enflamed by the humiliations of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. Germany's weakness, however, is turned around and proclaimed as its greatest strength – “[p]olitical weakness thus translates into moral strength.”<sup>23</sup> Just like the poor native victims of European imperialism, the Germans stood far superior to their European contemporaries with regard to morality, virtue, and culture. As will be seen in Chapter One, Herder placed the innocent German alongside “Hindus” and Montezuma’s Mexicans as a model of virtue. Invoking the imagery of classical mythology, he proclaimed that surely Zeus himself would rather sup at the table of these poor innocents than lower himself to dine with those whose hands are stained with blood. Imagining the noble German alongside the simple and the virtuous, not to mention, primitive, victims of European imperialism has a strong and convenient New Testament logic. What we see here is a perfect example of the “inversion of values” which Nietzsche attributes to the slave morality – the last shall be first, and the first shall be last.

Another motivation for looking to India and the East for the foundations of a German national culture was the identification of classicism with enlightened, modern French culture. This way of thinking became especially prominent in the years of military conflict between the German states and French Republican and Napoleonic armies. In the case of Joseph Görres, one of the central figures of Chapter Four, his biographer Jon Vanden Heuvel writes, “[t]he German Romantics, by shifting their gaze to Persia and India, by praising these cultures as older, more original, and more fundamental than Greece and Rome, were dethroning the ancient world, and by extension, French classicism.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The political and military humiliations suffered by Prussia were accompanied by massive reparation payments demanded by Napoleon.

<sup>23</sup> Zantop, 95.

<sup>24</sup> Jon Vanden Heuvel, *A German Life in the Age of Revolution: Joseph Görres, 1776-1848* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 138.

Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi makes the same argument about Friedrich Schlegel's efforts to link German culture to Vedic India.<sup>25</sup>

The psychological shift toward identification with the East, and with the victims of western European imperialism, was, in part, a product of what Liah Greenfield sees as the ambivalence of many German thinkers toward the "West." While the *Aufklärer*, and the *Bildungsbürger* generally, identified unambiguously with the image and ideals of the "Western world" in the eighteenth century (though this was by no means true of all German intellectuals), the Wars of Liberation inspired a new intense animosity toward the West:

Thus the moment Germans turned to national identity and acquired national pride, this pride was wounded, and not by Napoleonic conquest alone, but rather by the miserable and laughable state of their society, rendered conspicuous by the proximity of the West. Their hatred toward the West was fed by the very fact that the West existed.<sup>26</sup>

Greenfield frequently exaggerates when she writes of "the miserable and laughable state of their society" (at a time when the German-speaking world was producing such monumental cultural icons as Kant, Goethe, and Mozart), and the *ressentiment* that resulted. There was, however, an undeniable strengthening of an anti-French sentiment felt by many German intellectuals before the 1790s, and there were new efforts to construct a German identity that was fundamentally at odds with "western," neo-classical French culture.

Germany's real greatness was frequently seen as cultural, and many intellectuals argued that this greatness was precisely the *result* of its political weakness, not despite it. The opposite logic held equally true, of course, that political strength resulted in cultural and spiritual poverty. This ideal of the great *Kultur* nation is nowhere expressed more clearly than in Friedrich Schiller's prose outline for the poem "German Greatness" (c. 1801):

The German Empire and the German nation are two different things. The majesty of the German never rested on the head of his prince. The German has founded his own value apart from politics, and even if the Empire

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<sup>25</sup> Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, "The Nationalist Aspect of Friedrich Schlegel's *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*," *Sanskrit and 'Orientalism': Indology and Comparative Linguistics in Germany, 1750-1958*, eds. Douglas T. McGetchin et al (New Delhi: Manohar, 2004), 107-130.

<sup>26</sup> Liah Greenfield, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 372-373.

perished, German dignity would remain uncontested. Their dignity is a moral greatness. It resides in the culture and the character of the nation that are both independent of her political vicissitudes. . . . While the political Empire has tottered, the spiritual realm has become all the firmer and richer.<sup>27</sup>

This is a remarkably paradoxical self-image which combines plainness, simplicity, and innocence with intellectual sophistication and cultural achievement. It is also the image many German thinkers constructed of India. Herder and Novalis in particular envisioned the ancient Indians as Rousseau's ideal "noble savages." Their closeness to nature was seen as an expression of their childlike purity, which stood in stark contrast to the cruel and inhuman behavior of India's Muslim and European conquerors. On the other hand, the Indians were the originators of the most extraordinary philosophical system, comparable to those of the masterful Greeks themselves. It was this combination of seemingly paradoxical characteristics that made the Indians so potent in the ancient world, and would do the same for modern-day Germans. It was these shared qualities that inspired A.W. Schlegel to proclaim – "If the regeneration of the human species started in the East, Germany must be considered the Orient of Europe."

In tracing the origins of German orientalism to contemporary debates about national identity, I have been influenced by several key critiques of Said that have appeared in the past ten to fifteen years. While remaining within the discourse on *Orientalism* by focusing on the production of knowledge about the Orient as a discourse of power, these critiques have turned their attention to internal debates about national identity, especially in the period following the French Revolution. The literary theorists Nigel Leask and Saree Makdisi have focused on the works of the British romantic writers, especially Shelley, Byron, and Coleridge, as examples of an ambivalence toward the East that points to conflicting images of British identity in the romantic, post-Revolutionary era.<sup>28</sup> The historians Javed Majeed and Thomas R. Trautmann have focused on the debate in Britain between the "Orientalists" like Warren Hastings and William Jones, and

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<sup>27</sup> Cited in David Aram Kaiser, *Romanticism, Aesthetics and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 54.

<sup>28</sup> Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

the “Anglicists” like James Mill, over British rule in India and the image of British identity reflected in that rule.<sup>29</sup>

These works each deal with British orientalism, and the absence of a similar critique in the case of Germany has been one of the key sources of inspiration for the present work. As indicated above, a number of scholars have attempted to make sense of German orientalism by incorporating it into the larger phenomenon described by Said. In these cases, it is argued that Germany stood alongside Britain and France, however awkwardly, in the imperialist production of orientalist knowledge. The fact that there were no German political or economic ties to the “Orient” until the late nineteenth century has been dealt with by insisting that their complicity with British and French orientalism was a product of their desire to imitate imperial power over the Orient in the only way that was open to them.<sup>30</sup>

There is another possibility, one that has been virtually ignored, and that is my focus in this book. Instead of envisioning themselves as standing alongside the imperial victors, what would be the *utility* for German intellectuals of imagining themselves standing side-by-side with the victims of western European imperialism? The question here is surely one of utility. Orientalism, both popular and academic, came onto the scene in Germany at a crucial time when the institutions of national life were threatening to crumble under the pressure of competition for dominance within the *Reich*, especially between Prussia and Austria. It emerged as part of public discourse at the time when much of Germany was physically occupied by French forces. While it is often simply assumed that the Holy Roman Empire was essentially defunct and all but irrelevant by the late eighteenth century, a number of historians have shown just how vital the idea and institutions of the *Alte Reich* were even

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<sup>29</sup> Javed Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's The History of British India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Marchand engages in a similar critique in *Down from Olympus*: “While I applaud the efforts of Edward Said and Martin Bernal to elucidate the operation of these prejudicial Western tropes, I am convinced that the changing parameters and cultural salience of the three geopolitical concepts I sketched above [“Hellenism,” the “Orient,” and “Germandom”] depended heavily upon domestic developments that Said and Bernal do not take into account” (xxii).

<sup>30</sup> Part of the difficulty in this regard stems from the tendency to accept, rather uncritically, Said's overly-narrow description of the Orient as being virtually synonymous with the Levant. Even Varisco's recent *Reading Orientalism* seems to repeat this basic limitation of the cultural and geographical boundaries of the “Orient.”

in its last days.<sup>31</sup> The importance of the Holy Roman Empire in terms of providing a framework for a uniquely German identity became especially clear during the first decade of the nineteenth century when political and military defeat at the hands of Napoleon culminated in the official dissolution of the Empire.<sup>32</sup>

In light of these circumstances, identification with the political and military victors in Europe would have made little sense, and, even more importantly, would not have been very useful. On the contrary, all of the new textual evidence that was emerging in the same period about the antiquity and sophistication of Vedic Indian culture provided German intellectuals with an enticing new model for identification or emulation for reasons alluded to above and explored in detail below. Between 1789 and 1819, the German states underwent a period of radical political, social, and cultural change, unquestionably the most radical since the Thirty Years' War in the seventeenth century. As will be seen, as the times and circumstances changed, so did the prevailing image or images of India. These images evolved to meet the needs of the moment, and therein lies, perhaps, the greatest utility of what A. Leslie Willson has called the "mythical image" of India – its malleability.<sup>33</sup>

Knowledge about India, and exposure to Indian literature, philosophy, and religion were very new for most Europeans in the late eighteenth century, especially to Germans. This novelty meant that the "mythical image" was still very pliable, a decided contrast to the long established image of Greece as the birthplace of classical civilization. The malleability of the image of India was something it shared with Germany. In his *Lyceum Fragments* (1798), Friedrich Schlegel wrote: "The only thing one can criticize about the model of Germany, which a few great patriotic authors have constructed, is its incorrect placement. It doesn't lie behind, but before us."<sup>34</sup> India and Germany were both works-in-progress, and

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<sup>31</sup> Mack Walker, *German Home Towns: Community, State, and General Estate, 1648-1817* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), 185-216; Klaus Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), 595-671. Cf. also Karl Otmar v. Aretin, *Das Alte Reich. Vol. 3: Das Reich und der österreichisch-preußische Dualismus (1745-1806)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997), 489-531; John G. Gagliardo, *Reich and Nation: The Holy Roman Empire as Idea and Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 187-289.

<sup>32</sup> These events, and the impact they had on German orientalism and Indology, are the subject of Chapter Four.

<sup>33</sup> A. Leslie Willson, *A Mythical Image: The Ideal of India in German Romanticism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1964).

<sup>34</sup> *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1971), 147; *Kritische Friedrich-*

they could be, and were, used to shape one another. This is, of course, deeply ironic – that India, a three thousand year old civilization, was being “created” and shaped by a small group of German intellectuals in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>35</sup> This irony underscores the central point of my argument: the “mythical image” of India was not really about India at all; it was entirely about Germany. Consequently, this book is intended as a critique of Said and much of the literature on *Orientalism* only in so far as it argues that what was really at stake in German orientalist debates was never really about India. The present work is about competing models of German identity, and how images of India reflected these debates at a critical time in German history.

Two things should be made clear about the scope and intention of this book. First, the central concern of the pages that follow is the competing images of German national identity in the period from the 1760s to the early 1830s. This period witnessed the emergence of new ways of thinking about the nature and status of German identity and sparked debates about “Germanness” that would continue at least until the unification of the *Reich* under Prussian dominance in 1870-71. Second, it should be understood that what follows is not an attempt to provide anything like a comprehensive account for the emergence of orientalism in Germany. An examination of the remarkable increase in interest in Indian thought and culture, spurred on by the Early Romantics, cannot sufficiently account for the myriad influences that shaped the development of orientalism as a whole. Other scholars, whose work is considered below, have made significant contributions in recent years toward a more comprehensive account of the career of nineteenth century German orientalism. While the present work sheds some new light on this subject, the focus of this book remains on questions of German identity.

Joseph Lennon’s *Irish Orientalism*, published in 2004, examines a similar phenomenon in Ireland.<sup>36</sup> *Irish Orientalism* raises some questions which are in many ways relevant to a study of German orientalism. In

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*Schlegel-Ausgabe, Vol. II*, ed. Hans Eichner (München: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 1967), 151.

<sup>35</sup> This irony is not without historical significance, not just for Germany but for India as well. Max Müller’s image of an India profoundly shaped by the culture of the Vedas served as an important inspirational source for the Hindu Indian nationalist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Dietmar Rothermund, *The German Intellectual Quest for India* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1986), 47-58.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004).

particular, Lennon explains the attraction of the Orient to Irish writers and intellectuals in terms of identification with other victims of British imperialism. Arguments about some past connection between India and Ireland, for example, are seen as cases of a “mutual ‘othering,’” and therefore, “[t]o study Irish writings on the Orient . . . is also to study Irish cultural narratives of antiquity, Celticism, and nation.”<sup>37</sup> The same statement could be made of Germany simply by substituting the word “Germanness” for “Celticism.” Just like many of the German thinkers whose works are explored in the following chapters, numerous Irish intellectuals in this same period sought to legitimize their national culture by grounding it in a cultural tradition that was both demonstrably ancient and noble, but was also associated with the imperial periphery.

A cursory comparison of Irish and German orientalisms uncovers a number of striking similarities, and a more detailed comparative study might turn out to be of great value in the discourse on Orientalism. As in Germany, the most frequently cited evidence for Indian roots of Irish culture was linguistic, and stemmed from William Jones’ discovery that Sanskrit was an older member of the same language family that included Celtic, as well as Greek, Latin, German, and several other more modern European languages. Also as in Germany, many of the same scholars who were most drawn to orientalism also led the way in exploring the history and traditions of the native culture.<sup>38</sup> In both countries there was a clear link between the study of the national past and orientalism, a link which may seem strange at first, but one which becomes much clearer when considered in the context of their respective efforts at grounding a national identity. Finally, many Irish thinkers, like their German counterparts, perceived a deep, and even spiritual, affinity between their people and the culture and heritage of India.<sup>39</sup>

Despite these similarities, there is an obvious and profound difference between Irish identification with the colonized “other,” and the same kind of identity claimed by the Germans. Unlike the Germans, the Irish actually *were* the victims of British imperialism, regardless of how they represented their colonial identity in relation to the Orient. Although the Germans would experience occupation by the French for a generation from the early 1790s until the 1810s, this was hardly a comparable experience. It was much shorter lived, and bore little resemblance to the more properly “colonial” experience of the Irish. What makes these German claims even more incredulous at times is that in choosing to

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., xvii, xviii.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

identify with the colonial “other,” German thinkers often cited and denounced British imperial power, especially in India. From Herder and Georg Forster in the 1780s and 1790s, to A.W. Schlegel in the 1820s, these thinkers disqualified the English from any authentic understanding of India or the Indian *Volksgeist* because of the prejudicial nature of their interests there. Whatever animus was inspired in Germany as the result of being perceived as victims of European “imperial” power, it could not have come from the British.

The German construction of national identity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries might best be understood in terms of two classic studies of the history of nationalism, Benedict Anderson’s description of “imagined communities,” and Eric Hobsbawm’s work on “invented tradition.”<sup>40</sup> What both of these approaches emphasize is the artificial, constructed nature of the national community. Particularly relevant to a consideration of German romantic orientalism is Anderson’s exploration of the importance of literature, both in the form of newspapers and periodicals and the novel. The former build community by establishing an audience, while the latter literary form does so by shaping a form of communal consciousness in time.<sup>41</sup> The German Romantics were the founders of modern literary theory, and they were supremely conscious of the importance of style and form, and the effects they were intended to give.<sup>42</sup> From Friedrich Schlegel’s fragments, to the Schlegel brothers’ journal *Der Athenaeum*, to Novalis’ essays and fragmentary novel, the Early Romantics were intent upon establishing a collective identity through their literary productions.

Hobsbawm’s understanding of the invention of tradition is especially significant for understanding the connection between “Indomania” and “Teutomania” in the critical period between 1806 and 1815. Hobsbawm describes invented traditions as follows:

In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition. It is the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it, as unchanging and invariant, that makes the

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<sup>40</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983, 1991); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>41</sup> Anderson, 22-36.

<sup>42</sup> Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 5.



‘invention of tradition’ so interesting to historians of the past two centuries.<sup>43</sup>

The period covered by this book constitutes exactly the kind of “novel situation” that Hobsbawm describes. The failing health of the Holy Roman Empire, even before the Revolution, followed by invasion, occupation, and eventual liberation, resulted in several decades of near constant flux in the German states. There have been few, if any, comparable historical periods of prolonged contemplation of the nature of a communal identity and competing efforts to ground one.

As James Sheehan argues, “[i]n order to establish its identity, every nation must seek to create a national history.”<sup>44</sup> The intensely self-conscious efforts by German intellectuals in the early nineteenth century to establish a national identity makes Germany, in Sheehan’s words, “the *locus classicus* of national history.”<sup>45</sup> Recalling Friedrich Schlegel’s declaration that Germany “doesn’t lie behind, but before us,” that it must be created, I find especially compelling Matthew Levinger’s analysis of the project of German nationalism as a process of more or less self-conscious myth-making, as he employs Lévi-Strauss’ concept of *bricolage* to describe the “overdetermination” (leaning on Freud) of the competing images of German national identity.<sup>46</sup> The importance of myth as a model form for the ideas of Germany and German identity was central to the work of the Early Romantics, and had its roots in Herder’s work from the 1760s and 1770s.

It was not only a handful of intellectuals and radical romantics who understood the importance of crafting a national identity through myth-making and story-telling. Numerous powerful political leaders, especially in Prussia during the Napoleonic wars, attempted to perform the balancing act of awakening nationalist sentiment in the people of the German states, while, at the same time, giving them little enticement to agitate for actual political involvement. Later in the century, the construction of the

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<sup>43</sup> Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., 2.

<sup>44</sup> James J. Sheehan, “State and Nationality in the Napoleonic period,” *The State of Germany: The national ideal in the making, unmaking and remaking of a modern nation-state*, ed. John Breuilly (London: Longman Group UK Ltd., 1992), 47. Sheehan also describes the artificial character of national identity in his *German History, 1770-1866* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 371: “Nations are inventions, the products of particular historical circumstances and movements; they are not the causes and objects of national self-consciousness, but rather its products and projections.”

<sup>45</sup> Sheehan, *State of Germany*, 47.

<sup>46</sup> Levinger, 47-48.

monumental *Valhalla* by King Ludwig of Bavaria is perhaps the most extreme example of official efforts to cultivate a German national identity through the use of myth.<sup>47</sup> The difficulty of such a task can be seen in the ambivalence of Prussian state officials in their declarations to the people about their national identity: were they Prussians, or Germans, or somehow both at once?<sup>48</sup> Chapter Four examines a critical period in which romantic and official story-telling and myth-making were closely allied.

The romantic image of India did not, however, win out in the end. For a number of reasons, which are considered in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, identification with India ceased to be useful for German intellectuals, and especially state officials, as they contemplated the present and future German nation. Almost from the moment that German Indophiles began to study oriental languages in a systematic and disciplined way, they received stiff resistance from scholars of classical philology. Classicists had only been able to secure themselves a place in German universities, and consequently a relatively high place in German society, in the last ten to fifteen years of the eighteenth century. They prided themselves on their academic rigor and high scholarly standards, and they were innovators in the drive toward professionalism in Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>49</sup> Classical philologists frequently felt threatened by the claims of comparative philologists, and they were even deeply offended by some of the claims about the priority of oriental over Greek culture, as can be seen in the case of Johann Heinrich Voss in Chapter Four.

The romantic “mythical image” also had a very powerful enemy in the formidable Hegel, whose influence, probably more than any other scholar, helped to shape Prussian university politics in the years after 1818. Hegel’s arrival in Berlin from Heidelberg (where he had struggled against the Romantics over legal reforms) coincided with the turn toward Metternichian conservatism in the German states. The romantic correlation of German and Indian greatness had been useful to the state during the years of war with France, but now, with Napoleon gone, romantic pan-German nationalism became the enemy of the German states. Hegel was

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<sup>47</sup> See George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 47-72.

<sup>48</sup> Levinger, 36-38.

<sup>49</sup> Anthony J. LaVopa, “Specialists Against Specialization: Hellenism as Professional Ideology in German Classical Studies,” *German Professions, 1800-1950*, eds. Geoffrey Cocks and Konrad H. Jarausch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 27-45.

brought to Berlin by Altenstein in order to set a new tone at the university, and Hegel's Prussian, statist nationalism was central to his philosophy and attitude toward university politics. The romantic image of India embodied everything he rejected in romantic thought, including its conception of history, its attitude toward God and theology, and its politics. Chapter Six details Hegel's commitment to the annihilation of romantic "Indomania" during his years at Berlin (which turned out to be the last years of his life).

In the face of opposition from firmly entrenched opponents like the classical philologists and Hegel, the mythical image faded. It was replaced by a new form of professional Indology that attempted to be much more amenable to classical philology, at least in terms of methods and scholarly standards. This change suited the interests of both scholars seeking to establish themselves comfortably in the middle-class *Gelehrstand*, and the state, who identified "Indomania" with romantic pan-German nationalism. Indology emerged as a *Wissenschaft*, contained safely within the realm of a professional ideology, where it could make no real claims about what the state or "Nation" was, or could be. I conclude with a consideration of the decline of the mythical image, especially as it was affected by Hegel's influence on German philosophy, politics, and academic culture in the generation after his death.

## CHAPTER ONE

### HERDER'S *MORGENLAND*<sup>1</sup>

In matters of literature, linguistics, nationalism, and mythology, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) was the great forebear of German Romanticism. The exact nature of Herder's relationship to the Enlightenment and Romanticism is a question which still inspires heated debate. Since Isaiah Berlin's celebration of Herder's "pluralism" in his essay "Herder and the Enlightenment," Herder's legacy has, more often than not, been associated with that vague movement which has come to be known, not without controversy, as the Counter-Enlightenment.<sup>2</sup> This view has, however, had its critics.<sup>3</sup> An alternative possibility, one that has yet to be seriously considered, is that Herder, like Rousseau, might best be thought of as engaging in an "autocritique" of the Enlightenment.<sup>4</sup>

Questions about classification aside, what is certain is that Herder raised the issues and nurtured the ideas that the Early Romantics would articulate in more fully developed theories. He studied with Kant (though it should be noted that it was the pre-Critical Kant) and was profoundly influenced by him, but ultimately found Kant's rationalism too constraining. What Herder longed after was the greatness of man's creativity, the expression of the uniqueness of humanity in the world's cultures. In the 1760s and 1770s he set out in search of those aspects of human culture which would be most illuminating for modern man. Like

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<sup>1</sup> A shortened and revised version of this chapter appeared as "Herder's India: The 'Morgenland' in Mythology and Anthropology," in *Anthropology of the Enlightenment*, eds. Larry Wolff and Paul Cipolloni (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 119-137.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind. An Anthology of Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1998), 359-435.

<sup>3</sup> Robert E. Norton, "The Myth of the Counter Enlightenment," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (Vol. 68, No. 4, October 2007), 635-658. Steven Lestition's response to Norton, in the same publication, is also noteworthy.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Hulliung, *The Autocritique of Enlightenment: Rousseau and the Philosophes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

many of his contemporaries, and like the Romantics a generation later, Herder felt something lacking in the condition of modern man and he set himself the task of remedying that situation.

Herder's efforts to understand and champion the crucial ingredients for a fulfilling life for modern man led him to become the progenitor of two related but radically contrasting traditions. First, he coined the term *Volk*, which became the catch-word of nineteenth and twentieth century German racism. His emphasis on the value of German culture in the eighteenth century, while not entirely devoid of chauvinism, became a hostile, exclusive nationalism in the decades that followed. Second, Herder was one of the great neo-Humanist thinkers of his era, and his focus on the literary traditions not only of Germans, but of other central and eastern European peoples as well, sparked an interest in folk culture throughout Europe. Among the cultures Herder was most captivated by throughout his career were those of the *Morgenland*. Herder's conception of the *Morgenland*, like those of his contemporaries, changed significantly from the 1760s into the first decade of the nineteenth century. His interest as a Lutheran minister began within his own religious tradition, and his early interest lay primarily in Hebrew poetry. The tradition of biblical scholarship was quite advanced in Germany, especially in Protestant areas, and had been since the Reformation. But with the "rediscovery" of Persian and Indian literary sources in the 1770s and 1780s, Herder began to turn his attention eastward toward South Asia.<sup>5</sup> By the late 1780s and 1790s, Herder's *Morgenland* became India more often than not. While his influence on the Early Romantics has been well documented with regard to language<sup>6</sup> and nationalism,<sup>7</sup> the example he set of looking to India for inspiration has been largely overlooked.

It was Herder as much, probably more than, anyone else who began to equate India and the East both with the "childhood of mankind" and with the spirit of poetry. Like Rousseau before him and the Romantics after him, Herder placed special importance on childhood as a time of innocence, purity and closeness to nature. Poetry, rather than prose, was the mode of linguistic expression most suitable to such a time because it is the most purely expressive of genuine human emotion, in contrast to the rationalism of more recent times. Poetry and the East became inseparably

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*

<sup>6</sup> Ulrich Gaier, *Herders Sprachphilosophie und Erkenntniskritik* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1988); Robert Mayo, *Herder and the Beginnings of Comparative Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969)

<sup>7</sup> Robert Reinhold Ergang, *Herder and the Foundation of German Nationalism* (New York: Octagon Books, 1976)

linked in Herder's work, a theme that would later be picked up by Novalis more earnestly than any of the other Early Romantics. For the romantic generation that followed Herder, the precedent had been set, the image had been cast and had only to be reaffirmed and recast.

Herder's impact went well beyond the Early Romantics to affect German culture in a deeper and more practical way. His thinking on history, culture, and humanity was influential in the development of four new academic disciplines in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – anthropology, comparative philology, comparative mythology, and *Germanistik*. Though comparative mythology failed to take root in the university, the other disciplines went on to play a central role in the formation of German identity in the nineteenth century. This chapter will show how each of these new fields of study is connected to Herder's interest in the Orient, and the methods he employed in an effort to understand its importance for modern man.

### **Kant, *Popularphilosophie*, and Herder's Historicism**

Herder first arrived in Königsberg in 1762. He made acquaintance with Immanuel Kant at an opportune time, just as the latter was beginning a period of intense interest in the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and David Hume, among others. Kant's interest in these thinkers was significant because it represented a break with the scholastic tradition that dominated most German universities at the time. During the 1760s, Kant became one of the leading advocates of a new approach to philosophy known as *Popularphilosophie* in contrast to the *Schulphilosophie* of the Leibnizian and Wolffian tradition. *Popularphilosophie* had as its goal an approach to philosophy that was more "pragmatic," less metaphysical, and more concerned with issues of practical importance, particularly with regard to moral philosophy. In this way, the movement was a direct reflection of the French and English Enlightenments in the German *Aufklärung*. The other leading names associated, directly or indirectly, with *Popularphilosophie* were Moses Mendelssohn, Gotthold Lessing, and Friedrich Nicolai in Germany, Lord Kames (Henry Home) and David Hume in Britain, and of course Rousseau in France. Although the Critical Kant would turn away from this tradition, Herder remained faithful to it throughout his career.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Frederick Beiser describes the increasingly hostile relationship between the two philosophers in *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 149-153.