INTRODUCTION

On February 21, 1519, the citizens of Regensburg tore down the synagogue of the venerable Jewish community, whose documented existence in the city dated to circa 1000, making it at the time the oldest Jewish community in Germany. As in many German cities throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, razing the synagogue signaled the onset of expulsion. As he sketched the synagogue interior, Albrecht Altdorfer knew the expulsion was imminent; he sat on the same city council that gave the Jews two days to clear the synagogue and five days to evacuate the city.[1] Edicts of expulsion did not mandate that citizens tear down synagogues, but this was the usual way, with Christian churches symbolizing victory atop the rubble of Jewish houses of worship. Yet in Altdorfer's etching, it is the overwhelming sense of architectural durability, supported by massive arches, that strikes us. To heighten the synagogue's solidity, Altdorfer illuminated its supporting walls, vaults, and the column on the left with fiercer light than realism demanded. In the etching, the actual light comes from a window, with the light of the protective Star of David casting a faint shadow beyond the man leaving the synagogue for the last time. The man looks at us as his shadow reaches toward us, as if to implicate us in his fate. But the pull of history is with the woman before him, and she exits the door into a space where there is no light. For the Jews of this community, this is "the hour," to cite W. G. Sebald, "when the shadow falls."[2]

[1] Christopher S. Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape* (London, 1993), 251.
[2] W. G. Sebald, *After Nature*, tr. Michael Hamburger (New York, 2002), 36.

If Altdorfer rendered death-quiet interiors, it takes an act of imagination to conceive of the lively clamor outside the synagogue, as exultation accompanied its razing and the destruction of the wide aerial that constituted the Jewish quarter. Amidst this clamor, a stonemason fell from a beam in the synagogue, and the people assumed him dead until the next day when he returned. Astonished, the people proclaimed a miracle and promptly erected a wooden chapel and a stone pillar crowned by a statue of Maria holding the infant Jesus. The pope issued an indulgence for a pilgrimage to the site of the miracle, and swarms of the devout descended onto the square where once the synagogue had stood. They were in a state of religious ecstasy, and this circumstance drew the criticism of Martin Luther, who in his "Open Letter to the Christian Nobility" (1520) opined that people "run to these places in excited crowds, as though they had lost their reason, like herds of cattle."[3] But if Luther denounced the pilgrimage at Regensburg, he passed over in silence the expulsion of the Jews and the destruction of their community. His antipathies would soon be clear enough, however. In his infamous *The Jews and Their Lies*, written in 1543 after the great wave of expulsions had already occurred, he urged Christians "to set fire to [the Jews'] synagogues or schools and to cover over with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them." "Their houses," he also advised, should "be razed or destroyed."[4] Often historians quote these words as presaging the calamity of the twentieth century; in fact, however, they merely described a ubiquitous practice of an earlier era. By the time Luther wrote these words, the numbers of synagogues to be razed had dwindled precipitously; left were not artifacts of Jewish life but markers of Christian triumph.

The years between the first Jewish settlement in Regensburg and its destruction in 1519 roughly correspond to the arc of time that separates us from that destruction. It will come as a surprise to many readers that historians rarely think in long time spans, electing instead to confine themselves to more manageable chronological units, measured at most

[3] Martin Luther, "An den christlichen Adel," in *Martin Luther: Studienausgabe*, vol. 2, ed. Hans-Ulrich Delius (Berlin, 1982), 143.

[4] Martin Luther, "On the Jews and Their Lies," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 47, ed. Franklin Sherman (Philadelphia, 1971), 268–9. On Luther and anti-Semitism generally, see the brief but incisive remarks in Heiko A. Oberman, *Wurzeln des Antisemitismus: Christenangst und Judenplage im Zeitalter von Humanismus und Reformation* (Berlin, 1981).

in decades, rarely in centuries. The closer one gets to the present, the more chronologically myopic historians become, confining questions of continuity and rupture to the recent past. In German history, a subject in which twentieth century cataclysms understandably dominate historical concerns, this problem is especially pronounced and is becoming more acute. If historians once severed the nineteenth century from the early modern period, now they truncate the twentieth century from the rest. The result, in my view, is a sense of German history that shies from considering chronological depth and the historical connections across long spans of time.

I first began to think about these questions in Regensburg, where in 2003 we lived a few houses away from the *Neupfarrplatz*, a large, empty square, save for the awkwardly placed parish church in the middle. The new parish church was built upon the ruins of the synagogue whose interior Altdorfer had so carefully etched. At first, there was just a wooden pilgrimage church; then, in 1542, when Regensburg for a time embraced Protestantism, the wooden structure was rebuilt in stone and became the first Protestant church in the city. But nearly 500 years later, there was no gainsaying the spatial alienation of the church or the purposelessness of the square's graceless dimensions. For 300 years, the square was hardly used, save by the French occupiers, who in 1796 practiced troop formation there. By the mid-nineteenth century, merchants occupied the place on market days, and in the twentieth century, the Nazis disgraced it again by burning books there.

But the shadow first fell at the time of the initial destruction – not that 1519 prefigured 1933, or that Germany was already on a special path, but I did feel that there was a connection, etched in stone and evident in the architecture, that my training as a historian hardly equipped me to talk about. It is perhaps indicative that historians have come to think of these matters not because historical argument necessitated revision but because the precise poetic eye of W. G. Sebald forced us to look at the landscape of the past, its hidden traces and enduring shadows, with new intensity.[5]

This is the theme of this book. I am interested in how the centuries connect in German history, and in particular how it is possible to think

[5] But see also the immense success of Etienne François and Hagen Schulze, eds., *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, 3 vols. (Munich, 2002).

about historical change over long periods of time. The attempt, of course, is not entirely novel. Scores of books once saw German history as a kind of "hearse in reverse," backing into the past with the knowledge of the corpses it has piled up. This way of envisioning history, the opposite of a lachrymose conception, led historians to pattern the whole of the German past as if it portended its violent present. "The history of the Germans is a history of extremes," proclaimed A. J. P. Taylor in the first sentence of *The Course of German History*, written in 1944.[6] Nowadays, historians emphasize instead the shattered quality of the past. Frank Tipton, for example, begins his *History of Germany* with the figure of *Germania* – not the angry, confident woman guarding the Rhine, but the marble, jack-hammered fragments of floor that Hans Haacke intended visitors of the Venice Biennale in 1993 to walk over, disoriented and mournful.[7]

In German history, images of shattering and fragmentation have increasingly served as a "root metaphor," which, following the philosopher Max Black, may be defined as "a systematic repertoire of ideas by means of which a given thinker describes, by analogical extension, some domain to which those ideas do not immediately and literally apply."[8] The root metaphor of a shattered history profoundly influences how German historians connect the present to the past, and the past of contemporary history to earlier periods. According to some, it has even become "a new orthodoxy."[9]

The metaphor derives in part from a general postmodern stance, informed by "incredulity towards master narratives," as Jean François Lyotard has famously put it.[10] On a deeper level, however, shattered images also haunt testimonies of the Holocaust, strongly implying the collapse of transparency and the impossibility of insight, as if the sheen of civilization were as thin and impenetrable as the single row of barbed

[6] A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History: A Survey of the Development since 1815* (New York, 1962), 13.
[7] Frank B. Tipton, *A History of Modern Germany since 1815* (Berkeley, 2003), 1.
[8] Max Black cited in Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, 1974), 26.
[9] Interview with Geoff Eley and David Blackbourn, in *German History*, 22.2 (2004), 243, 245.
[10] Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, tr. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1984), xxiv.

wire around Auschwitz-Birkenau. Something like this image informed Primo Levi's description of Dr. Pannwitz, who gazed upon Levi with a look that "was not one as between two men," and more resembled the view "across the glass window of an aquarium between two beings who live in different worlds."[11] As in much Holocaust testimony, glass separates, paradoxically blocking the possibility of human understanding.[12] Shattered glass renders this impossibility permanent and irreparable. As an image, it is also more implacably final than reference to ruins, which can serve as new foundations, and which, as its romantic lineage suggests, enables longing and the imaginative reconstruction of home.

The "shattered past" implies, then, that the catastrophe of the twentieth century precludes traditional historical narrative as a vehicle for understanding what occurred. Historians can tell stories, but the attempt to bind them together into a coherent whole necessarily rings false. In their influential consideration of major themes in modern German history, Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer emphasize that German history is a "permanently fractured history," best told not with Walter Scott's confident cadences but with Uwe Johnson's "fragmented multilocal and cross-temporal narrations."[13] Perhaps, but metaphors of fracture and shatter draw their power from experience, and experience – lived, remembered, recounted – is not quite the same as history, which seeks to understand, to put things together and connect them, offering limited generalizations that allow for more insightful, if still imperfect, statements about the past. One can represent experience as shattered, but history tells differently (as does the chronologically ambitious, analytical narrative of *Shattered Past*).[14] The difference is significant. In his analysis of the Holocaust testimonies collected at the Fortunoff Archive at Yale University, Lawrence L. Langer relates the story of how a daughter struggles to understand the experience of her parents,

[11] Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, tr. Stuart Woolf (New York, 1993), 105.
[12] Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, 1991), 56–57.
[13] Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, 2003), 15, 358.
[14] See the highly analytic, close-to-the-current-state-of-historiography account offered in ibid.

Mr. and Mrs. B., who between them survived the Lodz Ghetto, Auschwitz, Dora-Nordhausen, and Bergen Belsen. "She draws on a vocabulary of chronology and conjunction," Langer writes, "while they use a lexicon of disruption, absence, and irreversible loss."[15] Are we not, in fact, closer to the position of the daughter, with history our "system of ladders . . . out and over the abyss"?[16]

This must imply a history less confident than Scott's narration suggests, but with an emphasis on human connections, not only the proximate causes but also the longer lineages, without assuming that continuities run in only one direction or that past events determine future disasters. This attempt at historical understanding, which in Inga Clendinnen's words is both "cumulative and never complete," governs the form of what follows, namely the essay, a series of attempts to construct bridges across chronological chasms.[17]

The essays – literally, attempts – address a series of questions that derive from what I call the altered "vanishing point of German history." The first essay, Chapter 1, suggests that a central reference point of German history, a vanishing point in the painterly sense of the term, has shifted from 1933, when Hitler seized power, to 1941, when the genocidal killing of the Holocaust commenced, and that this shift has considerable implications for the writing of German history. I try to understand how this shift came about and explore its potential impact. In painting, a vanishing point focuses the viewer's attention and determines the relative size of detail throughout the canvas. By analogy, the vanishing point in history determines the central focus of a disciplinary community, establishing central questions and deciding the scope of what counts. It does this not only for events chronologically close to the vanishing point, but also for those at considerable distance. In this sense, vanishing points pattern the writing of history, whether or not we wish them to. When Hitler's seizure of power in 1933 constituted the vanishing point, historians worked out interpretations of the nineteenth century that centered Germany's authoritarian traditions and illiberal politics. The new vanishing point of 1941 again challenges German historians to think in the long term, against what I see as an emerging

[15] Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, xi.
[16] The quote, and the line of argument, is from Inga Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 2002), 4.
[17] Ibid.

historiographical consensus that confines questions concerning the continuities of German history to the short, violent twentieth century. The new vanishing point also suggests different kinds of continuities, as the thing to be explained is not the political failure of elites but the collapse of fellow feeling among ordinary men.

In Chapter 2, I ask about the origins of modern nationalism and try to understand this problem against the background of an early-modern conception of the German nation. I do not agree with Ernest Gellner, who argued that as far as nationalism was concerned, any old scrap of nation sufficed, and that nationalists made nations, not the reverse. On the contrary, in Germany, as in France and England, the Netherlands and Spain, nations predated nationalism. Nationalists did not invent nations; they made sense of them in radically new terms. This new understanding involved the shift from an exterior sense of nation to an interior sense, from the nation as emblem to the nation as identity. It is, I contend, the invention of national identity, predicated upon a modern understanding of personhood that made the (German) nation of the (German) nationalists into a powerful, revolutionary, and portentous idea.[18]

In Chapter 3, I take up the legacy of catastrophic religious violence and follow Ernest Renan's famous suggestion that nations must also learn to forget. I compare the inter-Christian violence of the Thirty Years War with the Christian-Jewish violence of massacres and expulsions and ask whether, in the early modern period and into the nineteenth century, forgetting occurred in the sense that Renan implied. I have come to believe that after the Thirty Years War, which for the German population exceeded World War II in destructive fury, a blanket of forgetfulness covered over the experience, and that this covering lasted not decades but more than a century. When Germans rediscovered the Thirty Years War at the end of the eighteenth century, and with more engagement at the beginning of the nineteenth, it was a rediscovery of an

[18] For this line of thinking, a number of works have been formative. On the novelty of collective identity, see Lutz Niethammer, *Kollektive Identität: Heimliche Quellen einer unheimlichen Konjunktur* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 2000); on modern subjectivity, Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 2005); Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2004); Heinz D. Kittsteiner, *Die Entstehung des modernen Gewissens* (Leipzig, 1991); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

experience forgotten. Conversely, memory of the expulsion had a vital place in German culture, especially in local communities, the German hometowns. When debate about Jewish inclusion began, the reaction against it drew on this memory, which had become codified in ritual and in exclusionary practices. Continuity with the deep past proved strong; the history of Jewish inclusion vexed, with lasting results.

One lasting result was the continuing salience of anti-Semitic violence. Throughout the nineteenth century, this violence, which is the subject of Chapter 4, involved anti-Semitic theater: Rioters threatened and beat Jews, but rarely murdered them. I ask how anti-Semitic violence became murderous and approach the problem by collecting and analyzing all the incidences of anti-Semitic violence that required the intervention of military forces. Moreover, I collect these incidences of violence not just for Germany but for non-Ottoman Europe and suggest their novelty against the backdrop of a quieter eighteenth century and a seventeenth century in which the killing of Jews occurred amidst murderous clashes that involved other antagonisms. This approach enables us to discern the transition from community-based violence to violence defined in national terms; it allows us to see when and where the dam inhibiting murder broke; and it makes us appreciate the role of the state in halting, encouraging, and furthering anti-Semitic violence.

In Chapter 5, I explore the interconnection of modern anti-Semitism with racism, racism with the idea of the elimination of peoples, and anti-Semitism with the kind of racism that posited elimination. The long nineteenth century witnessed the transition from thinking about the annihilation of peoples in a cultural sense to conceiving of it in physical terms. Racism, as a theory and as a reflection of the practice of colonial rule, proved a powerful motor driving this dismaying transition. Yet elimination in the strong sense of the term, as genocide, remained inconceivable, whether in the mainstream or on the margin, except when it legitimated mass murder that had already occurred in colonial wars. The same does not hold for eliminationist experiments short of genocide, such as expulsion, ethnic cleansing, incarceration in concentration camps, and the creation of human reservations. Political publicists of liberal and conservative provenance entertained these possibilities, if reluctantly. In the nineteenth century, it was not yet possible

to think, as Hannah Arendt wrote of the twentieth-century concentration camp universe, that anything is possible.[19]

This is a book about the continuities of German history – about how ideas and political forms are traceable across what historians have taken to be the sharp breaks of history. In common parlance, continuity implies that something is uninterrupted, and in history that suggests that forms of ideas and politics remain homologous, of similar magnitude and like ratio, across significant political ruptures. In this spirit, Fritz Fischer famously argued for the continuities of German history, seeing the annexationist program of the German leadership prior to and during World War I as a direct precursor to Hitler's visions of world domination.[20] Differences in detail between the two sets of annexation plans seemed to Fischer insignificant when compared to their overall similarity in form. This continuity was, moreover, undergirded by an alliance of elites, which meant that at two different points of time leaders from the same social station brought into being Germany's aggressive politics. There are other arguments for fundamental continuity, notably those advanced with greatest cogency by Hans Rosenberg and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, emphasizing the political preponderance over the long term of conservative-reactionary elites in a period of rapid economic and social change.[21] This understanding of continuity posits a high degree of identity between the initial and terminal point of the continuum, and it suggests not merely structuring force but causal explanation. Advanced with élan, these continuity theses have been highly influential in German history. But they were always vulnerable to criticism that derived from arguments of contingency: that history is open and multivalent and that events can dramatically change structure.[22] These

[19] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, rev. ed. (New York, 1973), 437.

[20] For a penetrating recent discussion, see Klaus Große Kracht, *Die zankende Zunft: Historische Kontroversen in Deutschland nach 1945* (Göttingen, 2005), 47–68.

[21] Hans Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience 1660–1815* (Boston, 1958); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 4 vols. (Munich, 1987–2003) – with a fifth volume forthcoming.

[22] See Thomas Nipperdey, *Gesellschaft, Kultur, Theorie* (Göttingen, 1976), 360–389. But see also the historicist moments in David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Oxford, 1984), where the authors, in their words, attempt "to redirect(s) primary attention away from the deeper historical continuities" (50). In his review of Blackbourn and Eley, Nipperdey points out this historicist affinity, grounded in the necessity of preserving

criticisms chiseled away at the explanatory force of the continuity theses and opened important questions about the degree to which profound ruptures cut through the continuities of German history. We will return to these debates. Suffice here to say that I think of them as being largely over, but with fallout that cannot be satisfying from the standpoint of German history in the long term. Such a history must still think about connections across time, and connections require us to think across what are undeniably caesuras in the German past.

I take as my starting point connections within symbolic forms of German history, and in particular those forms – nation and nationalism, religion and religious exclusion, racism and violence – that have long histories, that are at the center of the German past, and that did not emerge, "*per saltum*," in the modern world. Within this context, continuity means something quite specific.[23] It does not mean that events from a given point tend to a certain outcome, or that the later point merely reiterates a starting point. The first position is teleological, the second theological, at least in the sense that circular understandings of history derive from Christian precedents.[24] Nor is it my claim that, from a certain point, change is mainly endogenous (i.e., unaffected by events external to the system) and thus determined by factors specific to Germany – as Fritz Fischer, for example, argued. Instead, I make two kinds of assertions about continuity. The first is that adequate explanations of twentieth-century events ought to have historical reach, and this reach ought to encompass periods longer than the lifetime of an individual. This kind of long-term explanation requires us to consider ideas, institution, and politics over significant periods of time, both within German history and across it. The "across" is important. Continuity need not imply particularity, and precisely the most important continuities – seen

a sense of contingency. See Nipperdey's review in *Historische Zeitschrift*, 249 (1989), 434–437.

[23] For the following discussion, I am indebted to Alexander Gerschenkron, "On the Concept of Continuity in History," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 106.3 (June 1962), 195–209. Gerschenkron describes five kinds of continuity: constancy of direction, periodicity of events, endogenous change, length of causal regress, and stability of the rate of change (200). When I refer to "the continuities of German history," I intend the term continuity mainly in the fourth sense, length of causal regress, but sometimes in the fifth, which, even in Gerschenkron, is mainly a method for seeing not continuity but break.

[24] M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revelation in Romantic Literature* (New York, 1971), 197–252.