

'Hitler's Thucydides': Percy Ernst Schramm (1894–1970) and the Problem of Nazi Historiography*

S. I. Rubinstein 

In 1967 the art historian Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968) went to Munich to receive the Order 'Pour le Mérite'.¹ The order's chancellor, the historian Percy Ernst Schramm, was a man he knew well. Their lives had once run in parallel: they had even found themselves, by chance, on the same ship in 1933, Panofsky travelling to New York and Schramm to Princeton.² But thereafter their paths diverged. Panofsky, a Jew, did not return to Germany; Schramm did, eventually joining the Nazi Party and serving as the official diarist of the Wehrmacht high command. Panofsky thus had reason in 1967 to observe the irony that he should receive the order from a man he called 'Mr Hitler's personal Thucydides'.³

Schramm, as this unhappy sobriquet suggests, was among those German intellectuals whose reputations were darkened by questions about their relationship with Nazism. Formidable bibliographies have sprung up to grapple with this species of scholar, for Carl Schmitt in jurisprudence and Martin Heidegger in philosophy. In history, where no single figure attains their stature, such men as Otto Brunner and Heinrich Srbik have had to share the dubious honour.⁴ These literatures are often framed as quests to extricate scientific insights from their historical context, to discern 'what is living and what is dead' in apparently tainted works.⁵ Such lines of analysis are present-facing and value-laden, falling beyond the remit of historical inquiry. Certain questions of a historical nature do nonetheless arise: of how far, and for what reasons, intellectuals collaborated with the

*This essay originates in a Master's dissertation completed at the universities of Leiden, Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, and Oxford. I wish to thank the Europaeum; the electors of the Fruin Prize, with which the dissertation was awarded; and above all Prof. Herman Paul of Leiden and Dr Joshua Bennett of Oxford, for their learned and generous supervision.

¹ See C. Wood, 'Panofsky in Munich, 1967', *MLN*, 131, 5 (2016), pp. 1236–57.

² P. E. Schramm, 'Übergabe des Ordenszeichens an Herrn Erwin Panofsky im Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in München am 26. Juli 1967 (im Rahmen einer Feier zu dessen zwanzigjährigem Bestehen)', *Orden Pour le Mérite für Wissenschaften und Künste: Reden und Gedenkworte*, vol. 8 (Heidelberg, 1967), pp. 211–17, here p. 214.

³ Cited in D. Wuttke (ed.), *Erwin Panofsky: Korrespondenz 1910 bis 1960*, 5 vols (Wiesbaden, 2001–11), vol. 5, p. xxxi. Translations from German are my own.

⁴ See H. Lehmann and J. Van Horn Melton (eds), *Paths of Continuity: Central European Historiography from the 1930s to the 1950s* (Cambridge, 1994).

⁵ This Crocean turn of phrase abounds in Schmitt studies, e.g. G. Balakrishnan, *The Enemy: An Intellectual Portrait of Carl Schmitt* (New York, 2000), p. 261; E. Kennedy, *Constitutional Failure: Carl Schmitt in Weimar* (Durham, NC, 2004), p. 172.

Nazi regime; of what ‘Nazi historiography’ was, where its origins lay, and whether any of its traces persisted into the postwar era. An investigation of the varied career and writings of Percy Ernst Schramm will help shed light on these questions. The debate over ‘Nazi historiography’ is hardly new, however, and has a thorny history of its own. Its flashpoints reflect those of modern German history: the critical moments cluster around the years 1945, 1968 and 1989.⁶

When historians were denazified after the war, the proceedings pertained to modes of thought as much as personnel. The ‘catastrophe’ could be construed as proof that the earlier tradition of German historiography had failed—which is why its doyen, Friedrich Meinecke, had to go on the defensive.⁷ In West Germany the spirit of postwar reconciliation suppressed most efforts at critical self-evaluation. Their resurfacing in the mid-1960s grew out of a belief that denazification had failed and that further purgation was necessary. Three publications, manifesting those intellectual currents which erupted in 1968, criticized traditional German historiography along such lines. Georg Iggers and Fritz Ringer simultaneously postulated and lamented a German historiographical *Sonderweg*, stretching back to the German Empire.⁸ They were pipped to the post in a short polemic by Karl Ferdinand Werner.⁹ Werner’s depiction of a squalid, conservative intellectual culture, exposed from the beginning to Nazi exploitation, was unsurprisingly welcomed by historians on the left.¹⁰ But it was not, and did not purport to be, dispassionate analysis, and so Andreas Dorpalen was right to hope that its principal effect would be to stimulate ‘systematic investigation’.¹¹

Scholars were sluggish to attend Dorpalen’s summons. The call was eventually answered in the late 1980s by a British historian, Michael Burleigh.¹² As with his compatriots Ian Kershaw and Richard Evans, Burleigh was detached from West German patronage networks; all three could therefore present themselves as honest brokers in the ongoing *Historikerstreit*, when the historical profession in West Germany was tearing itself apart over difficult questions about the place of the Holocaust in German history.¹³

⁶ Cf. O. G. Oexle, “Staat”—“Kultur”—“Volk”: deutsche Mittelalterhistoriker auf der Suche nach der historischen Wirklichkeit 1918–1945, in P. Moraw and R. Schieffer (eds), *Die deutschsprachige Mediävistik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Ostfildern, 2005), pp. 63–101, here pp. 64–9.

⁷ F. Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe: Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen* (Wiesbaden, 1946).

⁸ G. G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, CT, 1968); F. K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge, MA, 1969).

⁹ K. F. Werner, *Das NS-Geschichtsbild und die deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1967).

¹⁰ For example, F. Graus, ‘Geschichtsschreibung und Nationalsozialismus’, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 17 (1969), pp. 87–95.

¹¹ A. Dorpalen, review of K. F. Werner, *Das NS-Geschichtsbild*, *American Historical Review*, 74, 1 (1968), p. 206.

¹² M. Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of ‘Ostforschung’ in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1988).

¹³ See R. J. Evans, *In Hitler’s Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (London, 1989).

In *Germany Turns Eastwards*, Burleigh emphasized the practical consequences of historians' cooperation with the Nazi regime. It was not just that some historians had failed to resist Hitler or tacitly supported him: in Burleigh's view they had blood on their hands. Burleigh's book made little impact in West Germany itself, perhaps because it ruffled professorial feathers.¹⁴ Nonetheless, around the time of Germany's reunification, German historians followed Burleigh in pointing fingers at their forebears.¹⁵ (It probably helped that by this stage the egregious culprits were mostly dead.) In 1992 Karen Schönwälder recapitulated Werner's arguments in a more scholarly register.¹⁶ For them, as far as historians in Nazi Germany were concerned, Hitler could rely, to coin a phrase, on willing executioners.¹⁷ This thesis, having received its fullest expression at the 1998 *Historikertag* in Frankfurt am Main, has remained the dominant view into our own century.¹⁸ But there remains one dissenting voice to which we ought to listen. Whereas Burleigh and Schönwälder presented the German historical profession under Nazism as a story of failure, Ursula Wolf was more positive.¹⁹ Most historians, on her account, were guarded against Nazi ideology by their commitment to scientific rigour: 'as a rule, the priests of Clio remained faithful to their muse'.²⁰

The debate over 'Nazi historiography' has thus tended to occur downstream of debates in historical theory. It mirrors a wider controversy over the extent of intellectual continuity between Nazi Germany and what came before and after and has therefore often supplied a means by which to relitigate the well-worn question of whether 1945 marked a 'Stunde Null', a new beginning. In Schramm we have a historian who published prolifically before, during and after the Third Reich—one who prior to 1933 was a typical adherent of the German historiographical traditions that Iggers and Schönwälder decried; one who then at once cooperated with the Nazi regime and kept a certain ideological distance from it; and one who after 1945 helped construct a putatively new German historiography, fit for a newly democratic state. Was his historical thought independent of the political upheavals through which he lived? Did he remain faithful to Clio?

¹⁴ This was Burleigh's suspicion: J. Crace, 'Michael Burleigh: The Reluctant Guru', *The Guardian* (11 Mar. 2008), <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2008/mar/11/academicexperts.highereducationprofile>.

¹⁵ See S. Berger, *The Search for Normality: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Germany since 1800* (Providence, 1997), and its mordant review by J. Z. Muller in *Central European History*, 32, 4 (1999), pp. 473–5.

¹⁶ K. Schönwälder, *Historiker und Politik: Geschichtswissenschaft im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt/Main, 1992).

¹⁷ D. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, 1996).

¹⁸ W. Schulze and O. G. Oexle (eds), *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt/Main, 1999).

¹⁹ U. Wolf, *Litteris et Patriae: das Janusgesicht der Historie* (Stuttgart, 1996).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 405; cf. S. Berger, 'Nationalism and Historiography', *German History*, 18, 2 (2000), pp. 239–59, here p. 249.

I. Percy Ernst Schramm: His Life and Reputation

Percy Ernst Schramm was born in Hamburg in 1894. His English-sounding first name betokened the high esteem in which Britain and her empire were held by the Hamburg elite and caused some consternation during the two world wars, when he was occasionally suspected of being half-British.²¹ As a boy he showed considerable promise, drawing the attention of his father's friend the art historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929). His studies were interrupted by the First World War. Upon returning from the Eastern Front, he went to Munich, where he attended some lectures given by Max Weber.²² He took a doctorate in history at Heidelberg under Karl Hampe, and in 1929 was called to a professorship at Göttingen. He established his reputation that same year with his study of political ideas in the age of Otto III (r. 996–1002), entitled *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio* (Emperor, Rome and Renewal).²³ In Weimar Germany Schramm was of the republican mainstream, scribbling down in his journal that 'the republic is the best kind of regime'.²⁴ While visiting Italy in 1924, he viewed Mussolini's movement with a mixture of curiosity and admiration.²⁵ Yet he gave Mussolini's German imitators a wide berth, preferring Gustav Stresemann's German People's Party (*Deutsche Volkspartei*).²⁶ His liberal-conservative disposition manifested itself, too, in 1932, when he campaigned for the re-election of President Hindenburg against Hitler.²⁷ The following year, however, while a visiting professor at Princeton, he welcomed Hitler's rise to power.²⁸ The Nazis were suspicious of latecomers, and when Schramm returned to Göttingen he found himself a target. The classicist Ulrich Kahrstedt inveighed against him in January 1934 for mingling with the enemy at a conference in Poland.²⁹ In March 1934 Göttingen's student society condemned him for his 'clear and sharp stance against National Socialism'.³⁰ Schramm hoped to appease his

²¹ Schramm, *Neun Generationen: dreihundert Jahre deutscher 'Kulturgeschichte' im Licht der Schicksale einer Hamburger Familie*, 2 vols (Hamburg, 1963–4), vol. 2, pp. 402–3.

²² Schramm to Warburg, 13 May 1920, Warburg Institute Archives, London (hereafter WIA) GC/12611.

²³ Schramm, *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio: Studien und Texte zur Geschichte des römischen Erneuerungsgedankens vom Ende des Karolingischen Reiches bis zum Investiturstreit* (Leipzig, 1929).

²⁴ For Schramm's Papers at Staatsarchiv Hamburg 622–1/151 L, I shall hereafter use the abbreviation 'SP': SP.234, §9 (13 July 1919). I thank Benedikt Schramm for granting me access to the family archive.

²⁵ Schramm, *Tagebuch einer Italienreise* (1924), pp. 4, 9, in SP.298.

²⁶ Schramm, 'Allgemeine Anfrage' (1947), p. 8, in SP.247.

²⁷ SP.237.

²⁸ J. Grolle, *Der Hamburger Percy Ernst Schramm: ein Historiker auf der Suche nach der Wirklichkeit* (Hamburg, 1989), pp. 22–7; cf. SP.185/1–4.

²⁹ SP.186/3. See C. Wegeler, 'Wir sagen ab der internationalen Gelehrtenrepublik': *Alturmwissenschaft und Nationalsozialismus—das Göttinger Institut für Alturmwissenschaft 1921–1962* (Cologne, 1996), pp. 148–62.

³⁰ SP.247 (27 Mar. 1934).

colleagues and students by joining the SA, a leap eased by the fact that he had long since warmed to Hitler.³¹

Some Göttingen Nazis continued to mutter about Schramm's political unreliability, but his position at the university was not imperilled, and throughout the 1930s he could continue his work unhurried. He produced a series of studies on medieval coronations, establishing himself as the foremost expert on the subject. On the death of George V, the Oxford historians Austin Lane Poole and Leopold Wickham Legg commissioned him to write a history of the English coronation, and as a result he found himself at Westminster Abbey for the coronation of George VI in May 1937.³² There he struck up a friendship with the archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Gordon Lang, who asked him directly whether he was a Nazi. Schramm replied,

With regard to rearmament, I am a 200 percent Nazi. With regard to the *Arbeitsfrieden* [Nazi ban on unions and strikes], the *Festigung des Bauerntums* [Nazi promotion of the farming class], *Kraft durch Freude* [state-run recreation and holiday organization], 100 percent Nazi. But racial theory, the Germanic cult, education policy, the Nazi worldview: [I am a] 100 percent opponent. I am not a member of the Party, and must ask myself every evening to what extent I agree with the Party's aims and to what extent I reject them. The answer is different every evening—this is not only my fate, but that of German intellectuals in general.³³

Schramm remained committed to Hitler's foreign policy in the run-up to the Second World War. He rejoiced at the *Anschluss* in March 1938.³⁴ In September he welcomed the Munich Agreement, assuring Lang, in a letter which was passed on to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and cited before Parliament, that there was no appetite in Germany for war with Britain.³⁵ The violence of Nazi antisemitism probably repelled him. Ehrengard, his wife, later recalled their horror at *Kristallnacht*.³⁶ Nonetheless, early in 1939 Schramm joined the Nazi Party: his membership card was backdated to 1937, giving rise to some postwar confusion.³⁷

In 1939 Schramm became more expressly nationalistic. In one lecture in May, on the Sudeten Germans, he celebrated Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia, and in another, in July, he looked forward to the redemption of Germany's lost possessions overseas.³⁸ As the

³¹ SP.239.

³² Schramm, *Geschichte des englischen Königtums im Lichte der Krönung* (Weimar, 1937).

³³ Cited in Grolle, *Der Hamburger Percy Ernst Schramm*, pp. 33–4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁵ Hansard, House of Commons, 6 Oct. 1938, vol. 339, col. 550. That Schramm was the 'German professor' in question is confirmed in SP.247.

³⁶ Ehrengard Schramm to E. H. Kantorowicz, 19 May 1947, SP.247.

³⁷ Schramm to the Denazifizierungs-Hauptausschuß, 7 Apr. 1947, SP.247.

³⁸ Schramm, 'Die Sudetendeutschen: ihre Geschichte und Leistung', *Nachrichten von der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* (1939), pp. 36–50; 'Der deutsche Anteil an der Kolonialgeschichte bis zur Gründung eigener Kolonien', in H. Plischke (ed.), *Göttinger Beiträge zur Kolonialgeschichte* (1940), pp. 34–63.

second of these lectures indicates, this year also witnessed a shift in Schramm's interests: although he was to return to medieval subjects later, his sole wartime publication, *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* (Hamburg, Germany and the World), was a social and commercial history of his native city in the nineteenth century, emphasizing its contribution to Germany's overseas empire.³⁹ During the Second World War, he prepared another book on similar themes, published in 1950 as *Deutschland und Übersee* (Germany and Overseas).⁴⁰ From 1941 he served in the Wehrmacht propaganda office, and in 1943 he took over the diary of the high command: he later grimaced that he had been the 'notary of the German downfall'.⁴¹ In the chaotic spring of 1945, he defied a general destruction order: after the war he liked to recount the derring-do that his preservation of the diary manuscripts had required.⁴² He handed his papers over to the Allies and eventually used them to produce the published edition.⁴³

Schramm resumed his professorship at Göttingen after the war—but not for long. In 1947 the British occupation determined that his past 'shows that it is undesirable for him to be in any capacity to influence the German youth'.⁴⁴ Despite the protestations of Göttingen higher-ups, Schramm was suspended. His eventual exoneration, on appeal, owed much to the intercession of Jewish émigré friends. That some Nazis had been suspicious of Schramm between 1933 and 1945 and that his sister-in-law Elisabeth von Thadden had been executed for her part in the resistance in 1944 also worked in his favour.⁴⁵ Further medieval publications followed Schramm's reinstatement at Göttingen, and he extended his foray into the nineteenth century. As well as busying himself in the 1960s with the Order 'Pour le Mérite', and his two-volume family history, *Neun Generationen* (1963–1964), he began to reflect seriously on the history of his own times. This reflection bore two pen-portraits of Hitler, which ignited considerable controversy in the years before his death in 1970.⁴⁶

³⁹ Schramm, *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt: Leistung und Grenzen hanseatischen Bürgertums in der Zeit zwischen Napoleon I. und Bismarck—ein Kapitel deutscher Geschichte* (Munich, 1943).

⁴⁰ Schramm, *Deutschland und Übersee: der deutsche Handel mit den anderen Kontinenten, insbesondere Afrika, von Karl V. bis zu Bismarck—ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Rivalität im Wirtschaftsleben* (Braunschweig, 1950).

⁴¹ Schramm, *Hitler als militärischer Führer: Erkenntnisse und Erfahrungen aus dem Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht* (Frankfurt/Main, 1962), p. 11; cf. SP.276.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 192–5.

⁴³ Schramm et al. (eds), *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht 1940–1945*, 8 vols (Frankfurt/Main, 1961–9).

⁴⁴ HQ Military Government, 31 Mar. 1947, in SP.247.

⁴⁵ SP.245.

⁴⁶ Schramm, *Hitler als militärischer Führer*, which compiled excerpts from the *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht*; Schramm, 'Einführung', in *Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier*, ed. H. Picker (Stuttgart, 1963), pp. 9–119, also published as 'Anatomie eines Diktators', *Der Spiegel* (1964), no. 5 (29 Jan.), pp. 40–61; no. 6 (5 Feb.), pp. 37–51; no. 7 (12 Feb.), pp. 42–56; no. 8 (19 Feb.), pp. 55–67; no. 9 (26 Feb.), pp. 39–49; no. 10 (4 Mar.), pp. 48–60.

Previous interpretations of Schramm can be mapped neatly onto the wider debate over 'Nazi historiography' outlined above. His denazification proceedings in 1947 in effect put the very notion of apolitical historiography on trial. The rector of Göttingen insisted that Schramm 'never gave up a single point of the scientific tradition in which he has been brought up', and the Danish historian Aage Friis and a number of émigré Jews said the same.⁴⁷ In the 1960s, however, Schramm's integrity as a historian began to be called into question. In the pages of *Der Spiegel*, Golo Mann suggested that he was a bad scholar in need of a different job; in a fiery lecture at Munich, Eric Voegelin called him stupid.⁴⁸ These attacks on Schramm were triggered by, and confined to, his publications on Hitler and Nazism: nobody cast aspersions on his other work. As such, it was still possible to discuss Schramm the medievalist while scarcely mentioning Schramm the Nazi Party member, Schramm the official diarist of the Wehrmacht high command, or Schramm the biographer of Hitler.⁴⁹

But 1987 was the last year in which this was so—for it was then that Robert Ericksen grouped Schramm among those historians who 'lent their souls to the devil'.⁵⁰ Schramm was defended by former students like Joist Grolle and János Bak, but Ericksen's arguments corresponded with what Burleigh and Schönwälder were preaching and have generally found favour.⁵¹ They were then stretched to their extreme in Norman Cantor's scabrous and gossipy book *Inventing the Middle Ages*. In a chapter called 'The Nazi Twins'—and rather in the manner of a twin study—Cantor compared Schramm with his friend Ernst Kantorowicz (1895–1963) in order to demonstrate that all that prevented Kantorowicz from following Schramm by becoming a Nazi was the variable of his Jewishness. Cantor condemned Schramm as a 'prominent Nazi accomplice and in effect a war criminal', finding 'essentially no difference between him and Albrecht [*sic*] Speer'.⁵² Cantor has found few admirers among specialists in modern historiography: upon reading his book Eckhart Grunewald, a Kantorowicz scholar, mused whether Cantor was 'a professor at

⁴⁷ R. Rosemann to E. H. Kantorowicz and Hans Rothfels, 3 Apr. 1947, SP247.

⁴⁸ G. Mann, 'Leserbrief', *Der Spiegel*, 8 (18 Feb. 1964); E. Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, ed. D. Clemens and B. Purcell (Columbia, MO, 1999), p. 130.

⁴⁹ For example, N. Kamp, 'Percy Ernst Schramm und die Mittelalterforschung', in H. Boockmann and H. Wellenreuther (eds), *Geschichtswissenschaft in Göttingen* (Göttingen, 1987), pp. 344–63.

⁵⁰ R. P. Ericksen, 'Kontinuitäten konservativer Geschichtsschreibung am Seminar für Mittlere und Neuere Geschichte', in H. Becker, H.-J. Dahms and C. Wegeler (eds), *Die Universität Göttingen unter dem Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 1987), pp. 427–53.

⁵¹ Grolle, *Der Hamburger Percy Ernst Schramm*; J. Bak, 'Percy Ernst Schramm', in H. Damico and J. B. Zavadil (eds), *Medieval Scholarship: Biographical Studies on the Formation of a Discipline*, vol. 1: *History* (New York, 1995), pp. 247–62. Cf. for example, P. Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton, 2001), pp. 229–37; N. Berg, *The Holocaust and the West German Historians: Historical Interpretation and Autobiographical Memory*, trans. J. Golb (Madison, WI, 2015), pp. 186–7.

⁵² N. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1991), p. 92.

Disney World'.⁵³ Yet he seduced some fellow medievalists, thereby impressing himself upon the burgeoning secondary literature on Schramm.⁵⁴ The nature of the relationship between Schramm's historical thought and his own times has so far largely been misallocated and misdiagnosed, often because his oeuvre has not yet been assessed as a composite whole. If we are to exploit the example of Schramm in confronting the problem of historiography in Nazi Germany, we shall have to follow the man through the course of his life, and a thousand years of history through the corpus of his writings.

II. Schramm the Medievalist

Schramm's heirs in the study of the Middle Ages have had to consider the extent to which his historical judgements were polluted by his politics and his times.⁵⁵ Hans-Werner Goetz claimed that Schramm saw Nazi Germany as the 'rebirth of the medieval *Reich*', cautioning his fellow medievalists to bear this in mind when reading his work.⁵⁶ The sole monograph on Schramm, by David Thimme, countered this line of interpretation.⁵⁷ So too did János Bak, ever adamant that his doctoral supervisor's 'political escapades'—an amusing euphemism—'did not colour his historical studies'.⁵⁸ Was Bak right? With regard to Schramm's medieval works, he was. Far from celebrating Nazism as a Romantic revival of medieval glory, what struck him about it was its *newness*. Moreover, his publications in medieval history between 1923 and 1939 cohere in form and content, suggesting that the political tumults of 1930s Germany did not substantially shape his historical thought. Such a judgement, that Schramm kept his work free from contemporary influence, would have gratified his younger self. It is true that he once had been enthused by Romantic images of the Middle Ages: in 1967 he wrote, with faint embarrassment, of how as a boy 'the twentieth century capitulated in my consciousness before the imperial glory of the Middle Ages'.⁵⁹ But in his first mature writings, he had already expressed anxieties about the

⁵³ Cited in R. L. Benson, R. E. Giesey and M. B. Sevchenko, reply by R. Bartlett, 'Defending Kantorowicz', *New York Review of Books* (13 Aug. 1992), <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1992/08/13/defending-kantorowicz/>.

⁵⁴ E. Garrison, 'Ottoman Art and Its Afterlife: Revisiting Percy Ernst Schramm's Portraiture Idea', *Oxford Art Journal*, 32, 2 (2009), pp. 205–22; A. Matikkala, 'Percy Ernst Schramm and "Herrschaftszeichen"', *Mirator*, 13 (2012), pp. 37–69.

⁵⁵ Schramm's articles in medieval history were compiled in *Kaiser, Könige und Päpste: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Geschichte des Mittelalters*, 4 vols (Stuttgart, 1968–71), but I have preferred to cite from their original publications.

⁵⁶ H.-W. Goetz, *Moderne Mediävistik: Stand und Perspektiven der Mittelalterforschung* (Darmstadt, 1999), pp. 79–80.

⁵⁷ D. Thimme, *Percy Ernst Schramm und das Mittelalter: Wandlungen eines Geschichtsbildes* (Göttingen, 2006).

⁵⁸ Bak, 'Percy Ernst Schramm' (1995), p. 247.

⁵⁹ Schramm, *Jahrgang '94*, vol. 1, p. 43, SP303.

infiltration of political and aesthetic values into historical interpretation.⁶⁰ In a 1923 essay, 'Über unser Verhältnis zum Mittelalter' (On Our Relationship to the Middle Ages), he warned of the danger to historical understanding when historians infuse the past with 'personal longing'. The nineteenth-century nationalist historian Wilhelm von Giesebrecht had been guilty of this: his *Geschichte der deutschen Kaiserzeit* (History of the Era of the German Empire) was 'a symptom of its time' suffused throughout with 'national longing'. At this stage of his development, Schramm opposed the conscription of history to serve contemporary ends. History, he wrote in a Rankean vein, is 'neither miracle doctor nor advice-giver' (*weder Wunderdoktor, noch gibt sie Ratschläge*).⁶¹

Schramm put the philosophy of 'Über unser Verhältnis zum Mittelalter' into practice in *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio* (1929). There he sought to rescue Otto III from the opprobrium of the nineteenth-century historians, Giesebrecht among them, by removing the nationalist biases which occluded their vision. Otto's detractors liked to point out, for example, that the emperor was not of purely Germanic stock: his mother, Theophanu, was a Byzantine princess.⁶² Schramm, however, praised Otto and his mother and defended his efforts for *renovatio imperii* (imperial renewal), previously dismissed as an unpatriotic fantasy.⁶³ Likewise, he rejected race as a meaningful mode of historical explanation. The civic identity of the early medieval Romans, he announced early on, was 'not a question of blood, but rather ... of political outlook'.⁶⁴ Such a pronouncement had a particular resonance in a Germany that was obsessed with racial classification. *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio* was published in the *Studien der Bibliothek Warburg* (Studies of the Warburg Library) and edited by employees of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek in Hamburg; from his relationship with Aby Warburg and his circle, Schramm acquired a positive view of Jewish scholarship and a negative one of nationalist and antisemitic historiography. Indeed, the first book that he cited in 'Über unser Verhältnis zum Mittelalter', and this positively, was Gottfried Salomon's *Das Mittelalter als Ideal der Romantik* (1922); Salomon was not just a Jew but also a contributor to the monthly *Der Jude*.⁶⁵ That Schramm was not a Jew set him on a different course to the rest of this milieu in the years after 1933.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Schramm, *Tagebuch 1920–21* (15 Oct. 1921), p. 35, in SP.

⁶¹ Schramm, 'Über unser Verhältnis zum Mittelalter', *Österreichische Rundschau*, 19 (1923), pp. 317–30, here pp. 318, 321, 330.

⁶² For example, W. von Giesebrecht, *Geschichte der deutschen Kaiserzeit*, vol. 1: *Geschichte des zehnten Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1855), p. 684.

⁶³ Schramm, *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio*, p. 88; G. Althoff, *Otto III* (Darmstadt, 1996), pp. 2–7.

⁶⁴ Schramm, *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio*, pp. 5–6.

⁶⁵ Schramm, 'Über unser Verhältnis zum Mittelalter', p. 319.

⁶⁶ See J. Grolle, 'Percy Ernst Schramm–Fritz Saxl: die Geschichte einer zerbrochenen Freundschaft', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Hamburgische Geschichte*, 76 (1990), pp. 145–68.

Insofar as the breakdown of his relationship with the Warburg Circle impacted his historical writing, a key and contested source is his 1938 introduction to the doctoral thesis of his student Berent Schwineköper, 'Die Erforschung der mittelalterlichen Symbole' (Investigation of Medieval Symbols).⁶⁷

It was here that Schramm furnished his project with a distinguished intellectual pedigree. Previously, as in the front matter to *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio*, he had acknowledged his debts to Warburg. But now, in the altogether different world of 1938, he had to excise Warburg from the narrative of his own intellectual formation. Casting about for a suitable replacement, he alighted upon the *historische Rechtsschule* (the German historical school of jurisprudence) of the nineteenth century. (This was not to be the last time Schramm edited his personal history amidst shifting political circumstances.) This legacy was not conjured out of thin air: in 'Über unser Verhältnis zum Mittelalter', Schramm had already praised the 'heirs of Grimm and Savigny ... [who] represented the discipline and pushed the political historians into the shadows'.⁶⁸ But between 1923 and 1938 Schramm changed in allegiance and self-identification. Whereas in 1923 he saw himself as the heir to the 'political historians' whose turf had been annexed by the Germanist jurists, in 1938 he himself was working within the 'tradition of Jacob Grimm'.⁶⁹ Schramm presented himself as a defender of this tradition, but he was not necessarily merely pandering to the regime. In his crosshairs were not, in fact, Warburg and his circle or the nineteenth-century Romantic nationalists of 'Über unser Verhältnis zum Mittelalter', but rather one of the scholars most associated with Nazism: Otto Höfler (1901–1987).⁷⁰ Schramm was critical of Höfler's forays 'outside his area of expertise'—beyond Germanic philology—and his efforts to graft concepts from that discipline onto history.⁷¹ The Germanist jurists, as Schramm wrote in the concluding pages of his *Geschichte des englischen Königtums im Lichte der Krönung* (translated as *A History of the English Coronation*), had been right to draw analogies between the history of law, symbol, and custom on the one hand and the history of language on the other.⁷² But Höfler had run amok with such analogies in order to construct, on a philological basis, 'a false image' of 'Germanic continuity'.⁷³ Even when tailoring his ideas for

⁶⁷ Schramm, 'Die Erforschung der mittelalterlichen Symbole—Wege und Methoden', in B. Schwineköper, *Der Handschuh im Recht, Ämterwesen, Brauch und Volksglauben* (Berlin, 1938), pp. vii–xx.

⁶⁸ Schramm, 'Über unser Verhältnis zum Mittelalter', p. 322.

⁶⁹ Schramm, 'Die Erforschung der mittelalterlichen Symbole', p. viii.

⁷⁰ Höfler was an *alter Kämpfer* who joined the Nazi Party in 1922; his *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen* (Frankfurt/Main, 1934) dressed Alfred Rosenberg's rantings in scholarly garb.

⁷¹ Schramm, 'Die Erforschung der mittelalterlichen Symbole', p. ix, n. 1.

⁷² Schramm, *Geschichte des englischen Königtums*, pp. 226–7.

⁷³ Schramm, 'Die Erforschung der mittelalterlichen Symbole', p. ix; cf. Höfler, 'Das germanische Kontinuitätsproblem', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 157 (1938), pp. 1–26.

a Nazi audience by rewriting the origins of his approach to medieval history, Schramm therefore set himself against Nazi ideas. Much as 'Über unser Verhältnis zum Mittelalter' underpinned *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio*, so too the theoretical arguments articulated in 'Die Erforschung der mittelalterlichen Symbole' were put into practice in Schramm's series of studies on medieval coronations in the medieval state.

Parts of Schramm's book on the English coronation have raised eyebrows. Philippe Buc found a reactionary, conservative subtext in Schramm's idea that ritual gave form and coherence to the medieval state.⁷⁴ Schramm had written,

Just as the human body is supported by the scaffolding of its bones—but which can only move because muscles cover them, because a brain controls movement, and because living blood rolls through the veins—so [too] the essence of a state is not limited to its constitution, laws, and theories. It must demonstrate its *life*; it must have a body which everyone can absorb with their senses. That is the deeper meaning of state festivals: they call the people to the consciousness that they form a body of which each individual is a member.⁷⁵

This organic, communitarian and mystical conception of ritual may, as Buc suggests, bear the influence of Goethe—but it is doubtful that it bears the influence of the 'Romantic-conservative reaction of the inter-wars era', or exists within a hermeneutics of ritual stretching from 'counter-revolutionary thinkers like De Bonald and De Maistre' all the way to Carl Schmitt and Nazi jurisprudence.⁷⁶ There is no evidence of Schramm engaging with these thinkers. And, as we have seen, Schramm tended to be forthcoming about his influences—especially when they happened to be jurists whose work was approved of by the regime. But while Schramm's understanding of ritual did not carry this political valency when he first acquired it, it could still superficially lend itself to aspects of Nazi ideology when necessary. One such instance resulted in the most contested passage in his medievalist oeuvre, on the final page of his *Geschichte des englischen Königtums*:

The twentieth century has already produced a lot of new things in this regard. To name just two examples—the festivals under the fasces at the sites of Roman history and the marches under the swastika in Berlin, Munich, and Nuremberg; renewed states [demand] new forms of stately life, in which the nation's individuality is expressed more clearly than in the paragraphs of its laws.⁷⁷

Schramm's perception of these state festivals followed naturally from his ideas about ritual. That he perceived Nazi festivals in such a way would seem at first glance to suggest that his conception of ritual

⁷⁴ Buc, *Dangers of Ritual*, pp. 229–37.

⁷⁵ Schramm, *Geschichte des englischen Königtums*, p. 230.

⁷⁶ Buc, '1701 in Medieval Perspective: Monarchical Rituals between the Middle Ages and Modernity', *Majestas*, 10 (2002), pp. 91–124, here pp. 121–2.

⁷⁷ Schramm, *Geschichte des englischen Königtums*, p. 231.

was reactionary and aligned with elements of Nazi ideology. In fact, however, his emphasis on the newness of these rituals indicates that he arrived at a different conclusion.

In Italy, the fascist parades could at least take place at authentic sites. In Germany, there was no historical continuity to be found. Schramm never lent any credence to the notion that the swastika was an ancestral symbol, and, as we have seen, he rejected the underlying mythology of 'Germanic continuity' wholesale. Nazi ceremonies were not genuine revivals of ancient practices, nor did they represent continuity with the past. Rather, Schramm thought that they were new creations for 'renewed states', original products of the twentieth century. The poignancy of the English coronation, to his mind, was that it represented 'a day in which past, present, and future join together', which contrasted with Britain's neighbours, where 'the times have fallen apart'. Whereas Italy and, even more so, Germany had experienced ruptures in their history, England, alone in western Europe, was still in communion with its past: 'only in England is it otherwise' (*Nur in England ist es anders*).⁷⁸ This continuity must have made a particular impression on Schramm as he sat in Westminster Abbey to behold the coronation of George VI in 1937, for he knew that his own ancestor Justus Ruperti (1791–1861) had witnessed the coronation procession of George IV over a century prior.⁷⁹ Schramm admired the English for having reconciled monarchy with liberalism and parliamentarianism, heaping praise on 1689 as the year in which 'constitutional monarchy' was erected.⁸⁰ He clearly did not lap up Schmitt's anti-parliamentarianism; nor does his emphasis on the politics of royal ritual correspond with the conventional Nazi appraisal of English ceremonial as Ruritanian affectation.⁸¹ Perhaps '1689' was for Schramm the kind of path that Germany should have taken. But by 1937, it was much too late. The Germans could now only look at England with a certain wistfulness.

British commentators on Schramm's book, which appeared simultaneously in English translation, were attuned to, even flattered by, the 'touch of envy' that permeated it.⁸² 'In comparison with the stern, set fasces', wrote H. V. Morton in the *Daily Herald*, 'the affectionate cheers at our own royal progresses may seem a bit tame', but Schramm, this 'Nazi Professor', had found that 'our emotions are deeper'.⁸³ Indeed so: whatever the necessity of ceremonial in these new states, Schramm clearly regarded such affairs as being, at best, makeshift improvisations for nations less smiled-upon

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. xii, 231.

⁷⁹ Schramm, *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* (1943), p. 69.

⁸⁰ Schramm, *Geschichte des englischen Königtums*, p. 224.

⁸¹ G. Strobl, *The Germanic Isle: Nazi Perceptions of Britain* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 119.

⁸² Schramm, *A History of the English Coronation*, trans. L. W. Legg (Oxford, 1937); H. V. Morton, 'A Nazi Professor Looks at the Coronation', *Daily Herald* (6 May 1937), p. 12, in SP:190.

⁸³ Morton, 'Nazi Professor'.

by providence. If the point of ritual was to transcend time, these twentieth-century novelties had no chance of success at all. Nor was Schramm alone in taking this view. Plenty of his contemporaries liked to contrast the new and exhilarating fascist and Nazi ceremonies with their humdrum British equivalents, only to find the latter superior and the former wanting. Schramm's sometime correspondent Herbert Butterfield (1900–1979) felt the same way.⁸⁴ 'When I first heard of the decision to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the accession of George V', Butterfield wrote in 1935, 'I was indifferent'. But, he concluded,

it is well that we should be able to show patriotism in a form that is unconnected with party, that we should indulge for a moment—though in a happier form—that love of parade and demonstration which Hitler and Mussolini persistently exploit.⁸⁵

This, though without the initial 'indifference', was essentially Schramm's perspective: Anglophile, one might even say whiggish, and devoid of the nationalist, reactionary or Nazi connotations that his readers have imputed to his medieval scholarship. Yet those readers were right to expect to discover such meanings in his historical writing. They were just searching in the wrong place.

III. Schramm the Modernist

In 1946 Schramm wrote a letter to Fritz Saxl (1890–1948), the director of the Warburg Institute in London, updating him on developments since their last interaction before the war. There he described how he had set his medieval interests aside and 'with one leg—maybe even the thicker one—entered modernity'.⁸⁶ He had also shifted from his emphasis on high politics—his medieval publications in the 1920s and 1930s all focused on kings, emperors, popes and nobles—to social, commercial and cultural history, especially that of Hamburg, his native city. Interpreting Schramm's wartime writings is made difficult by the fact that they underwent a great deal of postwar mythologizing. One conceit that recurs in the documents pertaining to Schramm's denazification proceedings in 1947 is that his identity as a citizen of Hamburg, by dint of that city's reputation for liberalism and Anglophilia, precluded him from being a Nazi. Hermann Nohl, the dean of the faculty at Göttingen, avowed that Schramm was never on the side of the Nazis: 'his Hamburg origins saved him from that'.⁸⁷ The Nazis themselves agreed: the American medievalist Gray C. Boyce recalled a Nazi academic at Göttingen

⁸⁴ See M. Bentley, *The Life and Thought of Herbert Butterfield: History, Science and God* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 356.

⁸⁵ H. Butterfield, *Journal* (6 May 1935), cited in Bentley, *Life and Thought of Herbert Butterfield*, p. 116.

⁸⁶ Schramm to Saxl, 20 Dec. 1946, WIA GC. Cited in Thimme, *Percy Ernst Schramm und das Mittelalter*, p. 506, n. 94.

⁸⁷ Hermann Nohl to Unterausschuß der Universität Göttingen, 2 Dec. 1945, SP247.

saying that Schramm ‘could not be a true Nazi’ because of his ‘family connections with Hamburg’.⁸⁸ Schramm himself maintained this line. When, after the war, he told the story of his light persecution by the Nazis during the early years of the regime, he repeated the refrain that they were suspicious of him because he was a Hamburg patrician. The Nazis, he wrote in 1947, had regarded him as ‘incurably liberal’ because he could not ‘peel off the shell of [his] origins’.⁸⁹ ‘My Hamburg origins benefited me’, he explained to János Bak in the final months of his life, by inculcating him with a certain openness and cosmopolitanism. ‘This orientation’, he continued, ‘was encouraged by my staunchly neo-humanist father’.⁹⁰ Schramm’s father, a Hamburg senator born in Brazil, typified Hamburg’s elite. Schramm dedicated *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* to him as the embodiment of the ‘old Hamburg’ which was swept away in the twentieth century and which only a few months earlier had been devastatingly bombed.⁹¹ Two decades later, in *Neun Generationen*, Schramm described how his father had rejected the thinkers whom posterity would remember as proto-Nazis: Max Schramm had loathed Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Paul Lagarde and Julius Langbehn.⁹² When, in 1964, Schramm propounded his thesis that Hamburg was a *Sonderfall* (special case) within the German *Sonderweg*, he did so to exculpate his home city, and himself and his family along with it, from the cultural and intellectual trends that had culminated in Hitler.⁹³ He even claimed to have written *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* in 1943 in subtle dissent against the regime.⁹⁴ Throughout his postwar career Schramm argued that his works on Hamburg, as with his Hamburg identity itself, were indicative of a resolutely anti-Nazi record.

In 1947, during Schramm’s denazification, he exclaimed to the émigré Jews Ernst Kantorowicz and Hans Rothfels that it seemed ‘rather strange to somebody who is so intimately connected with Hamburg to be attacked from this side’, that is, to be attacked now as a Nazi rather than as a liberal. To prove his case that he had never allowed Nazi ideas to interfere with his ability to teach or research history, he urged them to read *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt*. ‘Every reader can read between the lines ... my sympathy for liberalism and self-government’, he wrote, defying them to assemble

⁸⁸ G. C. Boyce to Unterausschuß, 29 Apr. 1947, SP.247.

⁸⁹ Schramm, ‘Notiz’, 22 Sept. 1947, SP.247.

⁹⁰ J. Bak, ‘Percy Ernst Schramm on P. E. Schramm’, in J. Bak, *Studying Medieval Rulers and their Subjects: Central Europe and Beyond*, ed. B. Nagy (Farnham, 2010), pp. 1–13, at p. 11.

⁹¹ Schramm, *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* (1943), p. 5.

⁹² Schramm, *Neun Generationen*, vol. 2, p. 451.

⁹³ Schramm, *Hamburg: ein Sonderfall in der Geschichte Deutschlands* (Hamburg, 1964). Cf. J. Jenkins, *Provincial Modernity: Local Culture and Liberal Politics in Fin-de-Siècle Hamburg* (Ithaca, NY, 2003), p. 7.

⁹⁴ Interview with *Kölner Stadtanzeiger* (14 Oct. 1969), SP.271. Cf. the second edition of *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* (Hamburg, 1952), p. 203.

‘some experts or a scientific organization’ to inspect the book and to find any ‘nationalistic observations’ whatsoever.⁹⁵ Rothfels, so persuaded by this rhetoric, did not even read the book before supplying the Göttingen tribunal with a letter in Schramm’s defence, noting that *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* had ‘surprised people over here ... by its frankness and open adherence to traditions which were banned by the Nazi regime.’ ‘The examination of the book’, said Rothfels, as Schramm had insisted, ‘should be a test case regarding the question of whether or not Prof. Schramm kept faith to the liberal and internationally co-operative spirit in which he was reared.’⁹⁶ Now let it be so.

Schramm has been praised for appearing to sympathize, in *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt*, with Justus Ruperti’s support for Jewish emancipation.⁹⁷ At first glance, Schramm seems to endorse a speech of Ruperti’s that was shot through with the ‘neo-humanism’ that he took to be his family’s guiding ethos:

For we all, Jews and Christians, are Hamburgers and know that in the end each individual is dependent on the flourishing of the whole. But truly, gentlemen, the emancipation of the Jews is for us no longer an act of compliance but of justice, and Hamburg can no longer evade it if it wants to keep step with the civilization of this century.⁹⁸

Upon closer inspection, however, Schramm’s argument was in fact making concessions to Nazi ideology. Whereas Ruperti, in his own words, supported Jewish emancipation in the spirit of justice and modernity, Schramm spun it differently. His Ruperti, he assured his readers, was ‘far removed from philosemitism’.⁹⁹ He had no choice but to emancipate the Jews, both because of their economic dominance in the city and because by the mid-century there were simply too many of them. It was Hamburg’s great misfortune, Schramm suggested, that the *Ostjuden* had been allowed to settle there. In Bremen, Hamburg’s sister-city, ‘this entire problem did not emerge, because [they] did not even let the Jews in’. In 1815, he explained, Bremen’s mayor

had managed to thwart legislation from the German Confederation that would have opened the gates of Bremen to the Jews, and it remained this way until 1848. His main objections were that the Jews would form a state within a state because of their solidarity and that they would apply a different morality among non-Jews as amongst themselves.¹⁰⁰

Schramm therefore gave sympathetic voice to a commonplace of Nazi thought: Jews could not be absorbed into the civic body

⁹⁵ Schramm to Rothfels and Kantorowicz, 1947, SP.247, pp. 4–5.

⁹⁶ Rothfels to Unterausschuß, 28 Sept. 1947, SP.247.

⁹⁷ Grolle, *Der Hamburger Percy Ernst Schramm*, p. 37.

⁹⁸ Schramm, *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* (1943), pp. 419–20.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

because they abided by a different morality.¹⁰¹ Schramm lamented that nineteenth-century Hamburg had not taken after Bremen's example.

The question of Schramm's attitude towards Jews is vexed. Prior to 1933 he appears not to have held any antisemitic prejudices. Even after 1933 he continued to cite Jewish scholars, including unpublished manuscripts, earning him some postwar goodwill.¹⁰² He used his Princeton connections to try to secure new jobs for his friends among Jewish refugees.¹⁰³ As a pupil of Aby Warburg, he was conscious of the contributions which Jews had made to his own research, and even in the Third Reich, as we have seen, he preferred to pass over Warburg's influence in silence rather than denigrate him. Even at a young age, Schramm was a critic of racial antisemitism.¹⁰⁴ Schramm's parents bore less tolerant attitudes, however, and when writing letters from Princeton after Hitler had come to power, Schramm moved closer to their cast of mind.¹⁰⁵ The antisemitism which arises from this correspondence, and from Schramm's other writings between 1933 and 1945, is still not of a racial type: although he thought in racial terms, he was confident that 'German blood' was strong enough to withstand 'Jewish blood' and therefore that Germans had little to fear from Jewish assimilation.¹⁰⁶ Nor was his antisemitism religiously inflected: his Christianity, he wrote to his mother in 1933, enhanced his sympathy for the Jews.¹⁰⁷ Rather, as *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* makes plain, Schramm's was an economic antisemitism. The problem with the Jews was that they colluded with each other to monopolize industries and had a 'decisive influence in the German "Wall Street"'.¹⁰⁸ Justus Ruperti had apparently witnessed their schemes firsthand in England. In London Ruperti had observed 'how the Jews were able to form a ring, which allowed them to drive others out of business'.¹⁰⁹

Despite his postwar protestations that *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* was devoid of anything that might be read as dovetailing with Nazi ideas, Schramm in fact later recognized that his wartime work contained antisemitic elements, recanting these in his postwar writings. In the very different political climate of the 1960s, he disavowed the Nazi idea of Jewish alienation from the civic community. One might even accuse the later Schramm of protesting too much: as if

¹⁰¹ For example, H. S. Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des XIX. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1899), p. 200, n. 1.

¹⁰² See R. Lerner, *Ernst Kantorowicz: A Life* (Princeton, 2017), p. 290.

¹⁰³ Schramm to T. J. Wertenbaker (13 Dec. 1933; 2 May 1935), Princeton University Library, Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker Papers, CO359, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Box 11, Folder 4.

¹⁰⁴ Schramm to Warburg, 12 June 1913, WIA GC/5570.

¹⁰⁵ See Schramm, *Neun Generationen*, vol. 2, p. 414.

¹⁰⁶ Schramm to Olga Schramm, 24 Apr. 1933, SP.185/2.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Grolle, *Der Hamburger Percy Ernst Schramm*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁸ SP.185/3, p. 7.

¹⁰⁹ Schramm, *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* (1943), p. 412.

to prove his philosemite bona fides, the Jews of *Neun Generationen* are ideal citizens, uniquely disposed by their cosmopolitan religion against what Julius von Eckhardt had called the 'constraints of particularism'.¹¹⁰ *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* contains some material that was fortunate to pass the censor, but we can hardly accept Schramm's insistence in his denazification proceedings that this work was exonerating evidence, nor say, with Schramm's student Grolle, that it was 'an astonishing document of hidden criticism of the regime'.¹¹¹ Better is the judgement of Walter Bußmann, in his obituary of Schramm: *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* possesses 'a general anti-Jewish mood' of the sort that one would expect from any book published in Germany in 1943, not least by a historian in the regime's employ.¹¹²

The same can be said of his treatment of England. Was there, Schramm asked the international community of historians amidst his denazification hearings, 'a single line, a single anti-British word' which might have called his principles into question?¹¹³ Again we must answer in the affirmative: *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* marked a sharp break from the author's earlier Anglophilia. It was not just his first name: Percy Schramm was brought up playing English games and wearing English clothes. Even when the English were his enemies, he revered them.¹¹⁴ Well into Hitler's dictatorship, Schramm was publicly expressing this reverence, as we saw in his *Geschichte des englischen Königtums*. But by 1939, when war seemed inevitable, Schramm was alluding to Britain's 'theft' of the German colonies.¹¹⁵ It is hardly surprising that Schramm should have borne a different attitude towards Britain in war than in peace, and indeed *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* opens with a sombre reflection on the destruction of the city in the British bombing campaign. It remains striking, however, how closely Schramm's image of Britain in this work hewed to Nazi propaganda, and how it fitted into his wider support for German expansion.

Here, too, his ideas were basically economic. Schramm had long been a critic of a certain strain of British liberalism, summed up by the term *Manchestertum*.¹¹⁶ In 'Über unser Verhältnis zum Mittelalter', he had already charged *Manchestertum* with eroding people's organic

¹¹⁰ Schramm, *Neun Generationen*, vol. 2, p. 52.

¹¹¹ Grolle, *Der Hamburger Percy Ernst Schramm*, p. 37.

¹¹² W. Bußmann, 'Nachruf: Percy Ernst Schramm', *Jahrbuch der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaft* (1971), pp. 203–10, here pp. 204–5.

¹¹³ Schramm to Kantorowicz and Rothfels, 1947, SP247.

¹¹⁴ Schramm, *Neun Generationen*, vol. 2, pp. 463–7; cf. N. Ferguson, *Paper and Iron: Hamburg Business and German Politics in the Era of Inflation, 1897–1927* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 61, 80.

¹¹⁵ Schramm, 'Der deutsche Anteil', p. 58; Grolle, 'Percy Ernst Schramm—ein Sonderfall in der Geschichtsschreibung Hamburgs', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Hamburgische Geschichte*, 81 (1995), pp. 23–60, here p. 29.

¹¹⁶ Strobl, *Germanic Isle*, p. 39.

relationship with their past.¹¹⁷ He elaborated on this in *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt*. *Manchestertum* was a betrayal of the early liberalism (*Frühliberalismus*) of Adam Smith. Indeed, if Adam Smith could have seen ‘what his progeny had made of his teachings, he would have shaken his head’.¹¹⁸ Among that progeny was the Jewish statesman and financier Walther Rathenau (1867–1922). English *Manchestertum* was the ‘beginning of the path’ that led to the idea that ‘the economy is destiny’ (*die Wirtschaft ist das Schicksal*), a phrase which Schramm had elsewhere attributed to Rathenau.¹¹⁹ *Manchestertum*—here we find a staple of wartime Nazi thought—was thus essentially of a piece with Jewish (and, indeed, Marxist or Bolshevik) materialism. This hostility to Britain also underlay his discussion of the origins of the First World War. England, transfixed by its bourgeois materialism, had grown envious of Germany’s growth, and Germany, rightly in Schramm’s view, had come to resent Britain’s global empire.¹²⁰ Thus were two once-friendly nations cleaved asunder.

During the war Schramm prepared *Deutschland und Übersee*, which would be published in 1950.¹²¹ He passed drafts of this book around his fellow historians in advance of its publication. Not all were pleased by the thrust of his argument. Gerhard Ritter (1888–1967), a conservative and nationalist historian who, unlike Schramm, participated in the resistance, raised a critical voice:

The less you burden this volume with political aspects, the better: not only because in the present situation I think a publication that could in any sense be seen as a declaration of German colonial or expansionist claims would be completely impossible ... but also because I hold the basic thesis of this book to be fundamentally false.

Ritter admonished Schramm for clinging to old patterns of thought that should have been banished from German historiography after the ‘catastrophe of 1945’, by in effect endorsing Germany’s imperial designs on Europe and beyond. Any historian, Ritter declared, who still advanced such ideas about the outbreak of war in 1914, ‘has not yet begun the necessary revision of the historical picture’.¹²² It is difficult to read either *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* or *Deutschland und Übersee* and not agree with Ritter’s judgement. Not only did the former contain antisemitic and ‘anti-British’ elements, albeit of the sort that ought to be expected from such a book, but the latter defended Germany’s war aims in 1914, and Germany’s right to imperial expansion, so effusively that in the light of 1945, its arguments were liable to repel even such men as Ritter. Here, far more than in

¹¹⁷ Schramm, ‘Über unser Verhältnis zum Mittelalter’, p. 320.

¹¹⁸ Schramm, *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* (1943), p. 266.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 322, 233: ‘Die Wirtschaft ist nicht, wie Walther Rathenau es behauptete, das Schicksal’.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

¹²¹ Schramm, *Deutschland und Übersee*, pp. 460–9.

¹²² Ritter to Schramm, 1 July 1947, in K. Schwabe and R. Reichardt (eds), *Gerhard Ritter: ein politischer Historiker in seinen Briefen* (Berlin, 1996), pp. 431–2.

his medieval works, we sense the penetration of reactionary nationalism into Schramm's historical writing. We cannot know the precise workings of Schramm's mind, but we can conjecture that Schramm decided in 1939 to step away from the Middle Ages and into modernity because his opinions about modern history were more closely aligned with Nazi objectives than his interpretations of the Middle Ages ever had been. His move to modern history was not unlike his joining the Nazi Party early in 1939, his speeches supporting the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the reclamation of Germany's lost overseas colonies, and his volunteering for the Wehrmacht when war finally came in September: 1939 was his fatherland's moment of need, and modern history provided him with the means to serve it. He carried this lesson with him after the war, when a new Germany called for a new version of modern history.

IV. Schramm the Biographer of Hitler

Schramm, like so many of his generation, emerged from the rubble of 1945 with old assumptions fatally challenged. The experience of Hitler gave him a pessimistic view of the limits of historical understanding. Hitler posed a problem for academic historians: how were they to account for an individual of whom even Alfred Jodl, who had witnessed the beast up close, 'after much consideration ... had to declare that the man remained a book with seven seals'?¹²³ Schramm thought historians could not solve this problem and ought to limit themselves to an 'auxiliary role': the 'X' at the core of Hitler's persona was one that could be decrypted 'only with help from psychologists and psychiatrists'.¹²⁴ This was especially true of Hitler's antisemitism, which was so pathological as to defy historical explanation.¹²⁵ Schramm's biographies of Hitler nonetheless sought to situate Hitler within German national history. More sober scholars than Norman Cantor have subscribed to the notion that Schramm viewed Hitler through a medieval prism, lending itself to a certain detachment and disinterestedness that might have suited Schramm's purposes.¹²⁶ But medieval themes did not weigh heavily on Schramm's mind when he wrote about Hitler. Indeed, one of his motifs is that the hunt for premodern precedents to Hitler would fail. At one stage he flirted with comparing Hitler with the emperor Julian the Apostate—but 'the comparison is flawed, because the emperor was very educated for his time and stood for a world that still contained spiritual

¹²³ Schramm, 'Einführung', in *Tischgespräche*, ed. Picker, p. 118.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 12.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹²⁶ Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages*, p. 94; Garrison, 'Ottonian Art and Its Afterlife', p. 209; Matikkala, 'Percy Ernst Schramm', pp. 38, 43, 69.

forces, whose revival was therefore not hopeless from the start'.¹²⁷ He likewise stopped short of comparing Hitler with Genghis Khan or Tamerlane because Hitler was far crueller; the only figure who could seriously rival him in this respect was Stalin.¹²⁸ Schramm was not just revealing his anti-communist colours here, or when he grouped Hitler, this time on account of their ideas about art, with Ulbricht and Khrushchev.¹²⁹ Rather, Schramm understood Hitler, much as he had understood Nazi rituals of state in *Geschichte des englischen Königtums*, as a thoroughly novel phenomenon.

This being so, Schramm's work on modern history provides a more relevant context than does his medieval scholarship for understanding his interpretation of Hitler. Schramm's Hitler was a modern man, *ein Mensch 'um 1900'*.¹³⁰ What Schramm meant by this was that Hitler had been shaped by the characteristic forces of the late nineteenth century, which he had elucidated in his works on that subject: jealousy of the British Empire, antisemitism, the writers whom Schramm's father disliked. Hitler proved himself to be a man out of step with his own times, 'dominated by the ideas of the nineteenth century' in his attitude towards foreign peoples. He had failed to realize, with tragic consequences, 'that the time for colonial rule, in which one people could dominate another, was coming to an end'.¹³¹ Schramm's portrayal of Hitler along these lines was not an attempt to explain him away as a *Betriebsunfall*, as a workplace accident: he wished instead to find his correct place within modern German history.

It was not because he had known the Führer personally that Schramm could present himself as an authoritative biographer. He was adamant that he had never spoken a word to Hitler, and there is no reason to doubt this.¹³² The image of Schramm supping at Hitler's dinner table was yet another of Cantor's inventions, borne of the bizarre misunderstanding that Schramm himself transcribed the *Tischgespräche*, the monologues delivered by Hitler.¹³³ Rather, Schramm's access to information about Hitler's life and character came from intermediaries. In his introduction to the published *Tischgespräche*, Schramm described how, imprisoned in the later months of 1945, he had found the opportunity to interview two of Hitler's doctors.¹³⁴ Schramm thus believed that he was supplying his readership with fresh primary materials on Hitler, but these materials

¹²⁷ Schramm, 'Einführung', in *Tischgespräche*, ed. Picker, p. 116.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 89–90.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹³² For example, Schramm, *Hitler als militärischer Führer*, pp. 11–12; Schramm, 'Der Zweite Weltkrieg als wissenschaftliches Problem', *Collected Papers of the Guest Lecturers in the Department of History, University of Oulu, Finland* (Oulu, 1970), pp. 3–30, here p. 5.

¹³³ Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages*, p. 92.

¹³⁴ Schramm, 'Einführung', in *Tischgespräche*, ed. Picker, p. 11.

were not his own personal recollections, and he was entitled to handle them only by virtue of his training as a professional historian.¹³⁵ He was flattered when people who had known Hitler corroborated his judgements with their recollections, but he consistently asserted that his judgements about Hitler were based upon ordinary historical method and that he was as detached from the phenomena he was explicating as a historian ought to be.¹³⁶

This narrative of disinterested objectivity suited Schramm's purposes. We may detect some hand-washing at play. Schramm's postwar writings on Hamburg, as we have seen, occasionally fulfilled this role, as when they disavowed his erstwhile antisemitism. And Schramm had plenty of other things to disavow: not only had he been a member of the Nazi Party, but he had also produced racist material, chiefly directed against the Russians, on behalf of the Propaganda Ministry between 1941 and 1943.¹³⁷ There also remained the uncomfortable question of how much he had known about the Holocaust and of his role in the development and propagation of the 'myth of the clean Wehrmacht'.¹³⁸ Schramm was evasive, sometimes minimizing his proximity to the higher levels of decision-making, other times boasting that he was privy to top-secret intelligence.¹³⁹ In his biographies of Hitler, Schramm took the conventional view that the war was principally caused by Hitler's foreign policy. One can read his account of the 1930s written a quarter century later, however, and be left none the wiser that he had wholeheartedly supported that foreign policy when it was in motion. He argued that the moment war became inevitable, the moment Hitler 'crossed the Rubicon', was when he annexed Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939: this was 'not only a blatant breach of obligation, but also a stark violation of the national idea and the right of self-determination'.¹⁴⁰ Yet Schramm had waxed lyrical about the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia when it happened:

Just as we wish to trade places with those who came before us, because they lived in the time of Bismarck and experienced him directly ... [so too] will those who come after us look to us because we lived in the time of Adolf Hitler.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ Schramm, 'Der Zweite Weltkrieg als wissenschaftliches Problem', p. 4.

¹³⁶ For example, Schramm to General Gerhard Engel, 10 Feb. 1964, SP264.

¹³⁷ M. Messerschmidt, 'Karl Dietrich Erdmann, Walter Bußmann und Percy Ernst Schramm: Historiker an der Front und in den Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht und des Heeres', in M. Messerschmidt (ed.), *Militarismus, Vernichtungskrieg, Geschichtspolitik: zur deutschen Militär- und Rechtsgeschichte* (2006), pp. 289–312, here pp. 307–8.

¹³⁸ Berg, *The Holocaust and the West German Historians*, pp. 186–7.

¹³⁹ Schramm, *Hitler als militärischer Führer*, p. 11; cf. K. Thieler, "'Schramm drüber": Percy Ernst Schramms vergangenheitspolitisches Engagement zwischen biographischer Ausblendung und politischer Aufklärung', in T. Siebeneichner (ed.), *Selbstentwürfe: neue Perspektiven auf die politische Kulturgeschichte des Selbst im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2021), pp. 23–45, here p. 30.

¹⁴⁰ Schramm, 'Deutschland und der Osten', *Stuttgarter Hochschul-Nachrichten*, 1, 6 (1957), p. 7, in SP292.

¹⁴¹ Schramm, 'Die Sudetendeutschen', pp. 49–50. Cf. E. Mühle, 'Hans Rothfels, Percy Ernst Schramm, der "Ostraum" und das Mittelalter', *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, 57 (2008), pp. 112–25, here p. 123.

One can therefore readily understand why these biographies, lacking in self-awareness, frustrated several of his readers. Schramm seemed to them to personify the postwar tendency towards selective memory.

Yet Schramm's forays into contemporary history in the final decade of his life should not be seen purely, or even principally, as exercises in self-exculpation. For one thing, this was practically unnecessary: by the 1960s Schramm was rehabilitated in the West German world of letters anyway, as attested by his election to the Order 'Pour le Mérite' in 1958 and to its chancellorship six years later.¹⁴² Moreover, whatever his evasiveness about his own beliefs and activities between 1933 and 1945, his writings on Hitler sustained a serious argument, one that cannot be reduced to wholly cynical motivations. Schramm has been criticized by Cantor and others for treating Hitler with the kind of distance with which a historian might treat a medieval king, and Schramm himself contributed to this perception by emphasizing his scholarly disinterestedness.¹⁴³ But this self-presentation deceives. In fact, his postwar works on Hitler broke from his earlier insistence upon apolitical historiography and staged an intervention in support of the Bonn Republic, much as his wartime writings had in various ways sustained the ideology of the then-prevailing regime. Schramm wrote about Hitler and Nazism first and foremost because he thought that knowledge about them would help 'inoculate' the Germans against future 'infection'. This metaphor recurs throughout his writings on contemporary history, as here in his introduction to the *Tischgespräche*:

If we understand how he [Hitler] came to power, how he expanded and consolidated it, how he seduced the Germans and—once he had seduced them—could no longer be stopped, then we inoculate ourselves against the danger that we, and those who come after us, experience the same or similar.¹⁴⁴

These sentiments were deeply felt. In a 1960 paper he argued that the German youth needed to learn more about 'the recent German past from 1933 onwards' in order to prevent them from exhibiting 'neo-Nazi symptoms'.¹⁴⁵ Near the end of his life he expressed pride at having toured German schools with the purpose of 'warning people' about the dangers of Hitler and Nazism.¹⁴⁶ Some of these school pupils later remembered the effect these speeches had on them.¹⁴⁷ His concerns, moreover, were reflected in his political activities around

¹⁴² He was also treated to a sumptuous Festschrift, edited by P. Classen and P. Scheibert: *Festschrift Percy Ernst Schramm zu seinem siebenzigsten Geburtstag von Schülern und Freunden zugeeignet*, 2 vols (Wiesbaden, 1964).

¹⁴³ Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages*, p. 94; Schramm, 'Einführung', in *Tischgespräche*, ed. Picker, pp. 11–12.

¹⁴⁴ Schramm, 'Einführung', in *Tischgespräche*, ed. Picker, p. 29.

¹⁴⁵ Schramm, 'Vorschläge für den Geschichtsunterricht in höheren Schulen' (1960), SP.258.

¹⁴⁶ Schramm, 'Der Zweite Weltkrieg als wissenschaftliches Problem', p. 19.

¹⁴⁷ E. Henning, "Das Unsichtbare sinnfällig machen": zur Erinnerung an Percy Ernst Schramms "Herrschaftszeichen", *Herold-Jahrbuch*, 12 (2007), pp. 51–60.

this time. In 1955 Leonhard Schlüter, a politician associated with the far right, was appointed minister for culture in Lower Saxony; Schramm was among the Göttingen faculty who successfully agitated for his removal from office.¹⁴⁸ Schramm likewise supported the prosecution with expert testimony in the trial of Otto Ernst Remer, the officer responsible for foiling Stauffenberg's 1944 conspiracy against Hitler, who was now attempting to launch a political career at the helm of the neo-Nazi Socialist Reich Party.¹⁴⁹ These two political interventions in the 1950s foreshadowed his historiographical interventions in the 1960s. Schramm's involvement in the Schlüter Affair sought to prevent Nazi 'reinfection' of West Germany, and his involvement in the Remer trial defended those who had resisted Hitler during the war from the charge of having injured national honour, or having stabbed the leadership in the back.¹⁵⁰

From his experiences as a soldier in the First World War, Schramm knew well the potency of a stab-in-the-back myth.¹⁵¹ He consequently thought it a matter of supreme importance that the German people knew they had lost the Second World War fair and square, as it were. Throughout his postwar works, Schramm sought to prove that German defeat was inevitable at least from 1943 and that Hitler had been aware of this.¹⁵² There had been no 'stab-in-the-back': not by the Italians when they switched sides, nor by Stauffenberg and his co-conspirators.¹⁵³ 'Sabotage and treachery', he concluded, 'had no perceptible impact on the course of the Second World War.'¹⁵⁴ Among Hitler's many crimes—his worst, from the German perspective—was that he had prolonged the war: it would have been better if, like Pétain and Weygand in 1940, he had accepted the defeat when it came, in the hope of negotiating a favourable peace. Had he done so, Schramm asserted, 'then today millions—yes, millions!—of our people would still be alive, on both sides of our borders'.¹⁵⁵ These were the central aims of Schramm's writings on Hitler in the 1960s, and they aligned with the state historiography of the Bonn

¹⁴⁸ Thimme, *Percy Ernst Schramm und das Mittelalter*, p. 521.

¹⁴⁹ Thieler, "'Schramm drüber'", p. 30.

¹⁵⁰ For the Schlüter Affair see G. H. Marten, *Der Niedersächsische Ministersturz: Protest und Widerstand der Georg August Universität Göttingen gegen den Kultusminister Schlüter im Jahre 1955* (Göttingen, 1987). For the Remer trial see N. Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration*, trans. J. Goltz (New York, 2002), pp. 251–76.

¹⁵¹ Schramm, 'Die Revolution (November 1918) erlebt an der Westfront: ein Beitrag zur Dolchstoßlegende', in C.-J. Friedrich and B. Reifenberg (eds), *Sprache und Politik: Festgabe für Dolf Sternberger zum sechzigsten Geburtstag* (Heidelberg, 1968), pp. 501–11, here p. 511.

¹⁵² Schramm, *Hitler als militärischer Führer*, p. 40.

¹⁵³ Schramm, 'Es war kein "Ital. Verrat"', *Der Spiegel*, 34 (18 Aug. 1968), p. 93, in SP.292.

¹⁵⁴ Schramm, 'So ging dieser Krieg verloren: die militärische Lage, 1943–1945', *Die Welt*, 106 (8 May 1955), in SP.253.

¹⁵⁵ Schramm, 'Gedenkrede zum Volkstrauertag' (14 Nov. 1964), p. 10, in SP.138. This implicit praise for Pétain was the one thing in his writings on Hitler that John Lukacs found objectionable: *The Hitler of History* (New York, 1998), p. 221.

Republic. It was in recognition of this that its first two presidents, Theodor Heuss and Heinrich Lübke, sent Schramm enthusiastic and supportive letters.¹⁵⁶ Others, however, were forerunners to Cantor in accusing Schramm of being too coolly detached, even too 'upbeat', in his appraisal of Hitler.¹⁵⁷ 'It is old wisdom', wrote Golo Mann to *Der Spiegel*, 'that the Devil has plenty of nice qualities', but 'the priest who does nothing but list the Devil's nice qualities would be asked to seek another job'.¹⁵⁸ Such criticisms of Schramm's writings on Hitler are unpersuasive, and Andreas Hillgruber, Schramm's protégé in contemporary history, was right to regard them as the products of crude misreading, wilful or otherwise.¹⁵⁹ Schramm's studies of Hitler cannot seriously be interpreted as offering a positive or even neutral evaluation of the man. His Hitler, after all, was the man who prolonged the war, against whom all resistance had been licit and just; he was a tyrant, personally responsible for 'the murder of millions'.¹⁶⁰

More compelling was the charge laid at Schramm's feet from quite the opposite direction: that his interpretation, far from being overly detached, histrionically emphasized the 'evil' and 'demonic' in Hitler, to the point of evading difficult questions of moral responsibility. One Viennese reader put it elegantly in his letter to *Der Spiegel*: 'The character of the rat-catcher (*Rattenfänger*) is not of principal interest: the main problem is the rats'.¹⁶¹ Still more witheringly, Eric Voegelin fashioned Schramm into his principal target in a series of lectures delivered in Munich in 1964.¹⁶² Voegelin regarded Schramm's emphasis on Hitler as the rat-catcher as a self-serving 'alibi'. All talk of Hitler's 'aura', his 'demonic' powers, could not account for those who, like Voegelin himself, had managed not to be reeled in. By the 1960s it was already a cliché to use this language about Hitler: Gerhard Ritter had done so in his (even more controversial) 1951 edition of the *Tischgespräche*, as had Meinecke in his *Die deutsche Katastrophe*.¹⁶³ But Voegelin was not alone in regarding this as cynical evasion.¹⁶⁴ 'The super-Devil [*Überteufel*] who hypnotises everyone', Hans-Bernd Gisevius declared in 1964, 'at the same time embodies absolution'.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁶ Heuss to Schramm, 4 Dec. 1963; Lübke to Schramm, 16 Dec. 1963, in SP:264.

¹⁵⁷ Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages*, p. 94.

¹⁵⁸ Mann, 'Leserbrief'.

¹⁵⁹ Hillgruber to Schramm, 20 Feb. 1954, in SP:24.

¹⁶⁰ Schramm, 'Einführung', in *Tischgespräche*, ed. Picker, p. 89.

¹⁶¹ W. Kindermann, 'Leserbrief', *Der Spiegel*, 12 (17 Mar. 1964).

¹⁶² Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, pp. 112–40.

¹⁶³ G. Ritter, 'Einleitung', in H. Picker (ed.), *Hitlers Tischgespräche* (Bonn, 1951), p. 18; Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe*, pp. 90, 154. This was Goethe's *Dämonische*, as Schramm recognized: 'Einführung', in *Tischgespräche*, ed. Picker, p. 119.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Berg, *The Holocaust and the West German Historians*, p. 187; M. Ruehl, 'In this Time without Emperors: The Politics of Ernst Kantorowicz's "Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite" Reconsidered', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 63, 1 (2000), pp. 187–242, here p. 225.

¹⁶⁵ Cited in 'Streit um Schramm: der Begriff der historischen Größe bei Adolf Hitler', *Die Zeit* (3 Apr. 1964).

None of this was entirely fair. Schramm knew well that Hitler was assisted by a compliant and enthusiastic populace: 'I do not want to release the Germans from responsibility for what happened.'¹⁶⁶ The problem was that he never reckoned with the fact that he was himself among them. The two sides of this back-and-forth in *Der Spiegel* in 1964 were, in any case, always talking at cross-purposes: Schramm had only ever presented his study as narrowly on Hitler's character, leaving the question of Hitler's relationship with the German people as untilled land for other scholars. We might surmise, with Voegelin, that Schramm, being one of the rats, found this the easier route to go down. What can be said with certainty is that Schramm's writings on Hitler had the most stridently political objectives of any of his historical works and do not indicate any lingering affinity with Nazism. He abjured Nazi ideas in support of the historical legitimacy of the Bonn Republic, and in so doing he took on, and took seriously, a sense of social responsibility. The experience of Hitler caused Schramm to spurn the articles of faith to which he had cleaved as a younger man. History, for the later Schramm, might be no *Wunderdoktor* (miracle doctor), but, to continue the medical metaphor, it possessed the power to inoculate and certainly had advice to offer.¹⁶⁷

V. Conclusion

Four days after Schramm's death, Herbert Butterfield reflected upon him in the light of his association with Nazism. 'In this as in other cases', he confided in his diary,

I have come to feel that a man's 'political' personality is not his real self [...] one must base one's judgements on the human being that one actually sees—the self that he offers to his direct neighbours—the self as it touches people immediately.¹⁶⁸

Not being Schramm's 'direct neighbours', we lack the means to perceive his 'real self'. But, equipped with his historical writing, we possess the means to uncover his self as a scholar and historian and to witness how that self was shaped by its times.

The breadth and range of Schramm's historical writing make it an instructive resource in the debate over 'Nazi historiography'. Yet so far Schramm has been conscripted in the wrong ways by the wrong sides. Those who took their cues from Iggers, Werner and Schönwälder have obsessed over his medieval scholarship, finding reactionary, nationalist or Nazi themes where there are none. Wolf, meanwhile, adduced Schramm's coronation studies from the 1930s in support of her minority position, but she also accepted Schramm's disingenuous postwar representation of his wartime writings on

¹⁶⁶ Schramm, 'Der II. Weltkrieg als Forschungsproblem' (6 Jan. 1964), in SP.137.

¹⁶⁷ Schramm, 'Über unser Verhältnis zum Mittelalter', p. 330.

¹⁶⁸ Butterfield, *Journal* (16 Nov. 1970), cited in Bentley, *Life and Thought of Herbert Butterfield*, p. 356.

Hamburg, painting a flattering picture of a historian who stood above the politics around him. To suggest that the two sides should, as it were, effect a hand-over would not seem to offer us a way out of the morass. But when we consider the *prima facie* improbability that a book published in Germany in 1943 would *not* contain antisemitic elements, when we consider how unaffected Schramm's publications in the 1930s were by Nazi ideas, we are compelled to regard Schramm's example as lending weight to Wolf's assessments. In particular, Schramm's example points us towards two of Wolf's general conclusions: first, that modern history was more 'politicized' in the Third Reich than medieval history, and second, that 1939 marked a more significant caesura in German historical thought than 1933.

These implications ought to be supplemented with a note on method in the history of historiography. We have now witnessed the futility of all those attempts to find hidden Nazi meanings in Schramm's medieval scholarship, on the one hand, and anti-Nazi meanings in his modern scholarship, on the other. We know that works of history always reflect the times in which they were written, but that they often do so in surprising ways means that the texts themselves, rather than their contexts, must take precedence as historical evidence. When we apply such methods to Schramm's case, we can see that he remained 'faithful to Clio', by any reasonable measure, at least until 1939. He might not have really been 'Hitler's Thucydides' during the war, but Panofsky's judgement immediately afterwards that he was a 'half-hearted, opportunistic Nazi' who 'did not agree with Hitler on all points but made the best of it' was close to the mark and might function as a summary motto for the historical profession in Nazi Germany as a whole.¹⁶⁹ What is most striking, however, is that Schramm did not return to a historiography naive of politics, to his youthful doctrines, after the war. Insofar as there are continuities between his wartime and postwar writings, they are continuities not of ideological substance but of philosophical orientation, concerning the responsibilities owed by history and historians to politics and to society. In Schramm we thus find an arresting illustration of both intellectual collaboration with Hitler and the postwar reconstruction of German historical thought.

Abstract

The historian Percy Ernst Schramm (1894–1970) distinguished himself in three discrete areas: the political history of the Middle Ages, the commercial history of nineteenth-century Hamburg, and the history of Nazi Germany and the Second World War. In the third of those fields, Schramm was not only an observer but also an active witness and participant: from 1939 to 1945 he was a member of the Nazi Party, and from 1943 he was the official diarist of the Wehrmacht high command. His postwar writings on Hitler

¹⁶⁹ Panofsky to Meyer Schapiro, 15 Aug. 1945, in Wuttke, *Erwin Panofsky: Korrespondenz*, vol. 2, p. 610.

attracted considerable controversy and can only be understood in the context of his other scholarly work. Drawing from archival materials as well as published sources, this article offers a comprehensive interpretation of Schramm's historical thought, finding therein a profitable case study with which to cast light on a contested chapter in the history of German historiography.

Keywords: Percy Ernst Schramm, Nazism, denazification, history of historiography, intellectual history

University College, Oxford, UK
samuel.rubinstein@univ.ox.ac.uk