



A Mighty Fortress: A New History of the German People

By Steven Ozment

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The word "German" was being used by the Romans as early as the mid-first century B.C. to describe tribes in the eastern Rhine valley. Nearly two thousand years later, the richness and complexity of German history have faded beneath the long shadow of the country's darkest hour in World War II. Now, award-winning historian Steven Ozment, whom *The New Yorker* has hailed as "a splendidly readable scholar," gives us the fullest portrait possible in this sweeping, original, and provocative history of the German people, from antiquity to the present, holding a mirror up to an entire civilization -- one that has been alternately Western Europe's most successful and most perilous.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

It takes erudition and verve to attempt a history that covers the life of a controversial people over two millennia. Harvard historian Ozment has plenty of both, yet the result is oddly unsatisfactory. Ozment (*The Burgermeister's Daughter*, etc.) quickly and wisely dismisses any notion that a history of Germany must be focused on the Third Reich. Instead, the travails of political disunity serve as his narrative anchor. Neither the ancient Germanic tribes nor their medieval and early modern successors could forge any long-lasting unity. Only under Bismarck did a unified political entity emerge, and it soon succumbed to visions of grandeur that resulted in two world wars and a Holocaust, renewed territorial losses and political divisions. Ozment's focus on disunity provides narrative coherence to a long, contentious and complex history, but the costs are huge. Particularly the early chapters read like "one damned thing after another" as a succession of tribal leaders, princes, kings and emperors march across the pages. So many important issues that might grasp a reader's interest are left out. There is nary a mention of economics, legal and social practices among the Germanic tribes, of women and working life. When discussing the Nazi worldview, the author has an unfortunate tendency to equate Jews and Christians as Nazi targets. It is certainly true that the Nazis were deeply anti-Christian, but the Jews were singled out for total physical annihilation. Ultimately, Ozment does not provide a history of the German people, but a tale of their rulers and a few leading intellectuals. 8 pages of b&w photos, maps not seen by PW.

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From [Booklist](#)

Like a moth to a flame, those who write general histories of Germany are drawn to the era of National Socialism. Some see the Nazis as an aberration; others find the seeds of totalitarianism as far back as the age of Luther. In this readable and absorbing survey of the Germans over the past two millennia, Ozment, who is McLean Professor of Ancient and Modern History at Harvard, thankfully avoids that trap. He refuses to allow a 12-year period of fascism to define a people or their history. Instead, he convincingly asserts that both liberal democracy and totalitarianism were novel experiments for Germans and the triumph of neither was preordained by German history. While some may be disappointed that Ozment devotes little space to the Nazi era, his analyses of the "barbarian" and Merovingian periods are fascinating and offer original perspectives on aspects of German history that are often given short shrift. This is an enjoyable and well-done work that is ideal for the general reader. *Jay Freeman*

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Review

"Readable and absorbing. An enjoyable and well-done work that is ideal for the general reader." (Booklist)

"Brilliant. A highly stimulating book and a pleasure to read, combining serious scholarship with verve and good storytelling." (The Washington Times)

"Clever and fascinating." (The Chicago Tribune)

"Insightful. . . . Persuasive. . . . Remarkable." (First Things)

"A masterly synthesis. (It) fizzes with bold hypotheses and subtle allusions. A heroic feat of scholarship." (The New Criterion)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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