

German Heroes: Heinrich Pantaleon, *The True Heroes of the German Nation* (1567–70)

Abstract

In his work *Der Teutschen Nation wahrhafftige Helden* [*The True Heroes of the German Nation*], the Basel historian, physician, and Protestant theologian Heinrich Pantaleon (1522–1595) showcased biographies depicting exemplary, virtuous, and patriotically-connoted actions by German (exclusively male) personalities from antiquity to the sixteenth century. His three volumes contained approximately 1,700 biographical sketches of secular and ecclesiastical rulers, philosophers, mathematicians, historians, jurists, theologians, and councilors, complete with portraits. In the third volume, for example, one finds portraits of Erasmus of Rotterdam (p. 55ff.), Ulrich von Hutten (p. 75f.), Martin Luther (p. 85ff.), and at the end of the book one of Heinrich Pantaleon himself (p. 529). Pantaleon's heroic, late-humanist collective biography personalized the German fatherland—quite literally—while taking a moral-reformist approach to patriotism.

Source

1. Book of Heroes of the German Nation, 1567

Volume One of the Book of Heroes of the German Nation: this section describes in entirely truthful terms the life and deeds of all the well-known Germans—both clerics and lay, of the upper and lower estates—who have graced and advanced their fatherland, the German Nation, by virtue of their character, authority, prowess with weapons, piety, wisdom, and cultural sophistication [*gute künst*] from the beginning of the world, primarily since the confusion of the languages,^[1] up until Charlemagne, the first German emperor, 800 years after Christ's birth.

These were first assiduously collected in Latin by the most scholarly Heinrich Pantaleon from nearly all the histories, chronicles, and accounts of the past, and artfully presented with images of all the individuals described (to the extent possible). The same author has now, however, translated these into German, and expanded and improved them for printing to exalt further the German Nation and also so that the common man might more easily have access to the German histories from the beginning of the world until the aforementioned time. An entertaining, interesting, and edifying read in its entirety!

Printed in Basel by Niclaus Brylinger's heirs / in the year of our Lord LVVII [1567]

[...]

Foreword

[...]

Among the Germans no one has thus far undertaken such an endeavor as this book. Although some older works do describe the lives of these heroes to a limited extent, they mix these together with useless fables and fairy tales so that hardly a shadow of the truth remains. Such works include those about Dietrich von Bern, Master Hildebrand, Hürnen Seyfrid, the loyal Eckhart, Duke Ernst, and other such characters as are praised in the songs of the common people and the meistersingers. Furthermore, the piety, devotion, and forbearance of the God-fearing Christian ancestors and martyrs of the German Nation in the holy legends has become so mingled with fables and fantasies that it is most unsatisfactory, for the truth has been lost among these fabrications. Due to the

shortcomings of our texts, eight historical German deeds go unmentioned, or are grossly misconstrued and diminished in foreign texts. If one were to assiduously study the ancient histories, however, and to consider these seriously, replacing the negligence—one might even say malice—of the one with the diligence and uprightness of the other, he would surely find that the German Nation, our fatherland, has, since the era of Noah's grandson Tuisco,^[2] been graced with valiant, astute men, although these [heroes] studied little of the liberal arts or scholarship.

As I have noted in my extensive reading of the histories, I have undertaken to collect the lives and biographies of famous German individuals from a wide variety of histories, chronicles, and accounts and to arrange these in such a way that German youth might be moved by the gallantry and piety which has gone before them and to honor these by approximating the same. Because there are so many of these individuals, however, I have not endeavored to describe all of our kings and princes who are treated in depth elsewhere, but only those heroes who were exceptionally virtuous, who showered the fatherland with their deeds, who valiantly wielded their weapons to defend it against foreign peoples, and who have been celebrated in pleasurable verses: the same of those who destroyed the idols and overthrew the pagan faith, who instructed the unknowing tribes in the Word of God and brought the Christian faith to our fatherland. And, finally, those Germans who received the crown of martyrdom and [those who] enjoyed fame among subsequent generations for their exceptional books. In the beginning, I hoped that this work would be completed quickly with little exertion, but as I spent several years reading many historical accounts, I came to realize that the project was too burdensome, at least as long as I was also occupied with other business and not sponsored by any particular patron, meaning that I was obliged to give this other (paid) work priority and more of my attention. Nevertheless, I steadfastly continued to proceed with the project as much as I could and finally finished the volume as I was able rather than as I desired, in this case also giving other knowledgeable individuals occasion to do this entertaining, useful work. It has been necessary, however, to divide this complete work on the famous individuals of the German Nation from the beginning of the world until the year 1568 into three volumes.

In the first book, which is available at present, we have introduced those heroes and saints whose fame dated from the beginning of the world in the ancient Germanic peoples until the time of Charlemagne, 800 years after Christ's birth. For in this period, the central Germans finally adopted the Christian religion, established a number of dioceses, and established the supremacy and majesty of the Roman Empire with great commendation, which by the grace of God has been maintained until the present.

In the second book, the Germans are described who lived between the age of Charlemagne and Emperor Maximilian I, a period of 700 years up until 1500 A.D. and decorated the fatherland with their virtues. Although we describe only the most exceptional clergymen and secular princes, we have listed the bishops of each individual bishopric in the German Nation after each other, up until the present age, in the account of the first bishop. In similar fashion, we have outlined the lineages and family trees of those princes who reign in Germany today in this second book to the best of our ability in the account of one of the valiant heroes of their line, so that one might see how one prince follows another and, finally, how the current state of rule came to be. There are without a doubt many more German heroes, noble and renowned persons, from the beginning of the world until the time given in the German lands, who are not included in either of these two books. It could be due to the sloppiness of the ancient scribes that they have been forgotten; or it could be that I have not noticed them in the most recent histories, even though I have assiduously looked for them. These may be added at a later point in time by an insertion.

[...]

II. *Book of Heroes of the German Nation*, 1568

Volume Two of the Book of Heroes of the German Nation: this volume describes in entirely truthful terms the life and deeds of all the well-known Germans, both clerics and lay, of the upper and lower estates, who have graced and advanced their fatherland, the German Nation, by virtue of their character, authority, prowess with weapons, piety, wisdom, and cultural sophistication [*gute künst*] from the time of Charlemagne and the first German Emperor over 700 years until the age of Emperor Maximilian I, or the year 1500 AD. Along with the genealogies, family trees, and origins of all the ancient and recent princes of the German Nation.

These were first assiduously collected in Latin by the most scholarly Heinrich Pantaleon from nearly all the folk stories, chronicles, and historical accounts, and artfully presented with images of all the individuals described (to the extent possible) and printed for the exultation of the German Nation and in order that the common man should be able to easily inform himself of all the German histories from the beginning of the German Empire up until the indicated time about the individuals described.

So that all royalty, elevated knights, and nobles in the German Nation can read these entertaining, interesting, and useful [accounts] of their forefathers and ancestors.

Printed in Basel by Niclaus Brylinger's heirs, A.D. LVVIII [1568]

[...]

Foreword.

[...]

Because the Germans ascended to the majesty of the Roman Empire and the highest monarchy and have, by the grace of God, held this now for 768 years, to the bewilderment of foreign peoples, it has happened that Germany has been graced with religion, the fine arts, military prowess, laws, and architecture, and has exceeded even itself in its virtues. And this despite the fact that the ancient Germans generally lacked in these regards and became famous only for their weapons and bravado, as the earliest accounts in this history adequately show. For this reason, the German nation has generally striven to adopt the virtues of foreign peoples, and, in the end, surpassed all these and attained the highest praise. We have thus begun this volume with the nascence of the German Empire and continued—with considerable effort—through to end—with divine assistance—with the reign of Emperor Maximilian I.

In this volume we will first make note of the piety and wisdom of our German ancestors who took on the Christian faith and granted the church so many rights, spreading the message of the Gospel to the barbarians and heathen afar. During this period the German language, together with the other fine arts [*gute Künste*], was refined and written down for the first time, for up until this point official documents had always been composed in Latin, as I was able to determine from the old charters and imperial declarations of rights. After this, we will learn about the virtues with which our ancestors were decorated in character and body, as was proven in their strong military defense of the empire and the way that they brought the raging peoples around them—in some cases with force, in others with holy persons—to live in peace and subservience. Because we have introduced the lives of eight renowned German heroes, however, we have also attempted to illustrate the lineages of the majority of the princes of the German Nation and their origins in family trees. Among these are a number who (like everything in this world, transient) have died out over the ages, but the majority of them have commendably survived. May God preserve and protect them for the good of the fatherland.

It had been customary in the German nation to have a number of distinguished schools in the monasteries and religious institutions, which produced many learned scholars, until the Occidental Church became primarily occupied with riches and worldly splendor and vanity. During that period, the fine arts and culture receded first to the Greeks and later to the Arabs. When even Constantinople, however, was seized by the Turks, a number of distinguished Greeks fled from the enemy to settle in Italy. Among these were [Basilios] Bessarion, a cardinal; Guarino [da Verona]; George of Trebizond; Theodorus Gaza; and others of a similar caliber. When their reputation became known among the Germans, many of these traveled out of love for the fine arts and culture to Italy and attended lectures in the schools there; they returned to their German fatherland graced with great understanding. These [Germans] included Nicholas of Cusa, Denis the Carthusian, Johannes Regiomontanus, Rodolphus Agricola, and many others who subsequently taught the Greek language and true philosophy in their fatherland. Their followers revealed the fine arts to the Germans so that these, in terms of their great intellect, surpassed all others in the world in the end, as the third volume here will show. It would be ungrateful and slovenly if we were to forget or ignore these ancestors, as the praiseworthy Emperor Maximilian I often enough warned the Germans as is proven by [the case of] his mathematician Johannes Stabius.

It is thus that I have taken up this task myself and compiled this account summarizing the lives and deeds of the most distinguished individuals of the German Nation taken from the historical accounts, chronicles, and other history books (to the extent that I could), and had it printed first in Latin. Because I also understood that this work might be of interest to some and was primarily intended for the Germans, I have, as encouraged by noble persons, translated it into German myself and made a number of improvements and added individuals—who were not included in the Latin edition and are marked by an asterisk—so that these same descendants might thus be moved by the virtues of their ancestors to desist from their vices and adhere to virtue and the honor and privilege of their ancestors and leave these to their children and descendants in a praiseworthy manner. I do not doubt, however, that in past times there were many more glorious, distinguished heroes and noble persons in the German Nation, who graced their fatherland with their virtues, but whom have been forgotten and not recorded in any histories. This has happened perhaps on account of the scribes' neglect or intentionally, for when scholars ignore these people on account of ignorance or arrogance they are omitted from their books ... and thus no memory of them or any recollection of their deeds has survived. For which reason I, too, have had to omit them even though I was most assiduous in introducing and revealing the most deserving German lives in this work with no prejudice or preference but rather on the basis of true history. And if I learn something new about the ancients, I shall include this in an insertion in the third volume.

Meanwhile, however, this new German book (reverend, glorious princes), diligently describes those who propagated and maintained our Christian faith, together with other erudite persons: the same for all the notable princes and heroes who graced our fatherland both in times of peace and war, from the great Emperor Charlemagne up to and including the Emperor Maximilian one after another (to the extent possible). In addition, I have chosen particularly virtuous men and patrons who have achieved fame among other princes in religious matters, the fine arts, bravado, and civic contributions, to whom I dedicate and inscribe my work and efforts in the laudable old fashion. As I was confident and did not doubt, many a cleric and secular prince or noble graciously found pleasure in this pleasant work for they knew of my ambitions and the majority of their learned councilors and servants chose as my most favorable lords chose to become patrons.

[...]

III. *Book of Heroes of the German Nation*, 1570

The Third and Last Volume of the Book of Heroes of the German Nation: this volume describes in entirely truthful

terms the lives and deeds of all the well-known Germans, both clerics and lay, of the upper and lower estates, who have graced and advanced the German Nation by virtue of their character, authority, prowess with weapons, piety, wisdom, and cultural sophistication [*gute künst*] during the reign of the four last emperors, [namely] Maximilian I, Charles V, Ferdinand, and Maximilian II, from 1500 up until the current year 1570.

These were first assiduously collected in Latin by the most scholarly Heinrich Pantaleon from nearly all the folk stories, chronicles, and historical accounts, in part during extensive travels throughout the German Nation and with the input of intelligent, trustworthy men, and presented here with portraits of all the individuals described. Now, however, the same author has translated these into German, and expanded and improved them for printing to further exalt the German Nation and in order that the common man should be able to easily inform himself of all the German histories up until the indicated time about the individuals described.

So that all royalty, elevated knights, and nobles in the German Nation can read these entertaining, interesting, and useful [accounts] of their forefathers and ancestors.

Printed in Basel by Niclaus Brylinger's heirs in A.D. LXX [1570]

[...]

Ulrich von Hutten, a Franconian

Ulrich was born into the noble von Hutten family in Franconia on the second day of April in the year 1488. This is an excellent and old noble lineage, for I find an Erentreich von Hutten who went into battle alongside Conrad, the duke of Franconia, in the era of Emperor Heinrich, that is, in the year 935, against the Huns and heathen and distinguished himself. Subsequently, a number of members of this lineage ascended to clerical and secular sovereignty as bishops or princes. When Ulrich was born into this family and proved to have a fine intellect, he followed the advice of his parents to study diligently and became proficient in all the liberal arts and good languages. Along with this great knowledge, he had an excellent command of weapons, and he delighted in visiting foreign nations. He thus supported Emperor Maximilian in the Venetian wars[3] with such distinction that he was knighted and highly praised. When, however Doctor [Martin] Luther's doctrines became known in his sermons and books, Ulrich adopted these and defended them against all their opponents as much as he was able: he wrote and spoke a great deal with a free tongue against the pope and a number of princes and cities, so that he was forced to leave his fatherland. After that, he wrote a variety of poems which were collected and published, for he was a good poet. He also spoke out publicly against Duke Ulrich of Württemberg and scolded him on account of a number of misdeeds. In response he got into a number of disagreements with Erasmus, and, due to his wide-ranging publications, he enjoyed great authority among the Germans. After spending his life thus, he came down with terrible sores[4] and lay ill in the countryside near Zurich, where he died in late August 1523 and was honorably buried. There are a number of epitaphs and inscriptions in his honor. Con. Gess.[5]

[...]

NOTES

[1] In other words, since the construction of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9).—trans.

[2] This grandson does not appear in established lineages of Noah's descendants; the figure is taken from Tacitus's "Germania," which refers, depending on the manuscript, to Tuisto or Tuisco. A fifteenth-century publication of older text fragments claiming to be from ancient Babylonia but now considered a forgery suggested that Tuisco had been a son or grandson of Noah, a claim that Johannes Aventis subsequently

included in his *Annals of Bavaria*.—trans.

[3] War of the League of Cambrai—trans.

[4] Ulrich von Hutten suffered from syphilis for the last decade and a half of his life. These sores are evident in Hans Holbein the Younger's portrait of Hutten from 1523—trans.

[5] Conrad Gessner—trans.

Source: (I.) Heinrich Pantaleon, *Teutscher Nation Heldenbuch: Inn diesem werden aller Hochuerrümpften Teutschen Personen, Geistlicher vnd Weltlicher, hohen vnnd nideren staths, Leben vnnd nam[m]hafftige thaten gantz warhaftig beschriben, welliche durch jhre tugendt, grosse autoritet, starcke waffen, from[m]keit, weißheit, vnd gute künst ... jr vatterland Teutsche nation höchlich bezieret, vnd groß gemachet ; Mit sampt aller alten vnd neuwen Fürsten Teutscher nation Genealogey, Geburtstafflen vnd harkommen*. Basel: Brylinger, 1567, title page, foreword. Available online: <http://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11055012-9>

(II.) Heinrich Pantaloen, *Teutscher Nation Heldenbuch: Inn diesem werden aller Hochuerrümpften Teutschen Personen, Geistlicher vnd Weltlicher, hohen vnnd nideren staths, Leben vnnd nam[m]hafftige thaten gantz warhaftig beschriben, welliche durch jhre tugendt, grosse autoritet, starcke waffen, from[m]keit, weißheit, vnd gute künst ... jr vatterland Teutsche nation höchlich bezieret, vnd groß gemachet ; Mit sampt aller alten vnd neuwen Fürsten Teutscher nation Genealogey, Geburtstafflen vnd harkommen*. Basel: Brylinger, 1568, title page, foreword. Available online:

https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb10936679_00008.html

(III.) Heinrich Pantaloen, *Teutscher Nation Heldenbuch: Inn diesem werden aller Hochuerrümpften Teutschen Personen, Geistlicher vnd Weltlicher, hohen vnnd nideren staths, Leben vnnd nam[m]hafftige thaten gantz warhaftig beschriben, welliche durch jhre tugendt, grosse autoritet, starcke waffen, from[m]keit, weißheit, vnd gute künst ... jr vatterland Teutsche nation höchlich bezieret, vnd groß gemachet ; Mit sampt aller alten vnd neuwen Fürsten Teutscher nation Genealogey, Geburtstafflen vnd harkommen*. Basel: Brylinger, 1570, title page, pp. 75–76. Available online: <https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/resolve/display/bsb11055014.html>

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