

The Philologist King
Politics and Knowledge in the Nationalist Era

The Germanists

In early September 1846, Germanist scholars from almost twenty states in the German Confederation met at an academic congress for the first time, in the city of Frankfurt am Main.¹ The purposes of the assembly, the *Germanisten-Versammlung*, were roughly those of modern-day conferences: to exchange ideas, stimulate further study, promote the discipline, and of course socialize and get to know one another “personally.”² The representatives of other, more established disciplines of the modern German research university had already begun to meet annually. The Association of German Natural Scientists and Physicians had organized conferences for a little more than two decades, starting in 1822, and the Association of German Philologists and Pedagogues assembled for the first of their conferences in 1838.³ The Germanist historians, jurists, and philologists knew they were latecomers,⁴ even academic upstarts, representatives of an only recently and quite slowly institutionalized discipline with relatively few university chairs.⁵

Opening the protocols of the roughly 200 Germanists,⁶ one might expect to find discussions specific to the field, such as reports on methods and findings, debates among exponents of different orientations or schools, celebrations of achievements, and announcements of new projects, all in line with the attempt to consolidate the new discipline. Yet the topics were more political. The entire first day was dedicated to presentations on the dispute over Schleswig and Holstein, the two duchies in between Germany and Scandinavia, a contested area with a mixed Danish-speaking and German-speaking population of about 800,000 inhabitants.⁷ A number of scholars, some of them hailing from the area and deeply invested in the debate, made the case against further Danish integration of the duchies, in the form of arcane legal-historical reasoning concerning the limited rights of the Danish crown or through claims about the predominance of

German culture in the areas. The question was explosive; in the decades to come, Danish and German troops would fight wars over the area.⁸

The session was introduced by a general address given by the new association's chairman, Jacob Grimm, probably the only scholar in attendance whose name remains recognizable to a present-day reader. Grimm did not speak directly about any particular scholarly issue but chose to articulate a fundamental concern for all Germanists: "Let me begin," he opened, "by asking the simple question: What is a people? [*Lassen Sie mich mit der einfachen Frage anheben: Was ist ein Volk?*]."⁹ *What is a people* – this was the question to which Jacob Grimm believed he had an adequate response, an authoritative answer, with profound political consequences. Along with his peers, Grimm presented himself as an expert on the long history, orderly communal forms, and shared language of the Germans,¹⁰ and he inserted himself into the debates of the day as a legitimate interpreter of the nation as a distinct being. He knew what a people was and believed that this knowledge was of momentous political significance; by delineating a particular people, he could prepare the ground for the reorganization of contemporary politics around the body of the *Volk*. Philological premises, methods, and insights, Grimm held, could help establish the precondition of legitimate politics, namely "congruency" between the institutions of rule and linguistic and cultural nationhood.¹¹ Grimm's philologist was not a lawgiver, not a sovereign, not a leader or tribune speaking in the name of the people, but he could, he claimed, delimit the people as a nation and hence determine the unit that could be represented, governed, and spoken for.

This chapter has four parts. It will begin with a portrait of Jacob Grimm that highlights his reputation among his peers around the time of the first Germanist convention in 1846; characterizes the direction and significance of his scholarly achievement; and analyzes his way of framing the ensuing debates, partly academic and partly political. In a second step, it will situate Grimm's programmatic statements on the people in the broader context of political ideology in Germany after the French Revolution and argue that the Germanist-nationalist project had absorbed the post-revolutionary premise of popular sovereignty but melded it with a historicist particularism; the existence of a *German* people, nationalists believed, required the construction of a German state.

The third part of the chapter then reconstructs how the vision of the national collective in shared possession of a territory understood as a homeland inevitably led to conflict between competing states, a dynamic manifest in the controversial scholarly discussion of clashing German and Danish territorial claims. In fact, the philologists claimed for themselves the ability

to guide and perhaps even adjudicate such disputes on the basis of historical, ethnographic, and linguistic knowledge. In a fourth and final segment, a non-exhaustive set of contrasting figures, such as the philosopher at the court and the critical journalist, will serve to illuminate some features of the political philologist and the particular conception of the relationship between knowledge and rule that this figure represented. Taken as a whole, this chapter reconstructs how Jacob Grimm's nationalist philology responded to the political challenges of his era.

The Philologist Jacob Grimm

The scholars gathered in Frankfurt in the fall of 1846 quickly elected Jacob Grimm as their chairman by acclamation.¹² Few figures, perhaps none, embodied the association more perfectly and commanded a similar respect among the assembled linguists, historians, and jurists.¹³ Grimm's reputation rested on a number of scholarly accomplishments, among them the *German Grammar* (1819, 1826, 1831, 1837) but also his *German Legal Antiquities* (1829) and *German Mythology* (1835). Each of these multivolume works had performed a feat of historical recuperation. Grimm's *German Grammar* was not a distilled set of rules meant as prescriptions for speakers.¹⁴ Instead, it contained a reconstruction of the genealogies of several Germanic languages – Gothic, Old High German, Old English, Old Saxon, Old Norse, Old Friesian, and then also Middle High German and New High German along with other modern Germanic languages – as they had branched out from a common source through a series of systematic transformations over time.¹⁵ The study of German legal history, a two-volume work that Grimm had completed with relative ease and joy,¹⁶ moved the focus away from the legacy of Roman law, championed by his teacher Friedrich Carl von Savigny, to piece together evidence of a communal legal tradition native to ancient Germanic life.¹⁷ Grimm's work on German mythology, finally, sought to compile the fragmented evidence of an indigenous German religion, a system of mythology affiliated with the better known Nordic traditions, but one that had been shattered by Christianization and subsequently devalued as primitive.¹⁸

Viewed as parts of a single project, Grimm's studies of language, law, and religion were intended to dispel the notion of German cultural inferiority compared with classical or French civilization and allow the full range of historical German life to be recognized as ancient, rich, and distinctive. The result was a massive cultural history of the German people that spanned the areas of grammar, lexicography, customs, narratives, law,

and even prehistory.¹⁹ Grimm believed that Germanic ancestors had spoken a tongue that was supple and well structured rather than coarse and clumsy; upheld an old and often colorful and poetic law suited to their community rather than living in barbarous anarchy; and maintained a structured and dignified relationship with the transcendent rather than superstitiously submitting to primitive fetishes.²⁰ When he appeared before his fellow scholars in August 1846, Grimm represented an ambitious and consistent endeavor to restore, in the medium of scholarship, the neglected and scattered substance of Germanic culture and convert it into an object of attachment and respect.²¹ His sequence of multivolume works sought to bring about a “relocation of cultural value,” which was non-cosmopolitan and non-classicist in character.²²

Speaking to the relatively new scholarly community of Germanists and expected to confirm its coherence and common subject matter, Jacob Grimm chose to address a fundamental issue: what makes a people – how can one define it? The unity of the Germanist scholars in their different disciplines was based, Grimm implied, not in a shared method or approach but in a common orientation toward a single object, a people. Grimm’s answer to the question he had posed was, according to himself, as “simple” as the question itself:²³ a people, a *Volk*, was nothing but the name for a community of human beings who spoke the same language.²⁴ Those who spoke German were members of the German people, despite any confessional, social, political, or ideological divisions; their shared medium of communication revealed a common identity more fundamental and significant than any apparent disunity: “our ancestors were Germans before they were converted to Christianity [*unsere Vorfahren sind Deutsche gewesen, ehe sie zum Christentum bekehrt wurden*].”²⁵

Grimm’s answer to his own question was philological in nature. It was philological in the sense that Grimm viewed the question of the people from the vantage point of his own expertise: he believed peoplehood was related to his primary focus of study, the internal structure and evolution of related but distinct languages teased out on the basis of available documentation. However, it was also philological in the sense that the philologist, the expert on comparative and diachronic linguistics, could fix criteria of national belonging and present himself as the legitimate arbiter of membership, the one who could determine the people’s contours. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the “people” was undeniably a political concept, emotionally evocative and dense with connotations;²⁶ after all, revolutions had been staged in the name of the people, countries formed, and constitutions established. To define the people philologically, as Jacob Grimm

did, ultimately meant to address or even intervene in politics with philological means, an implication of which Grimm was aware.

Although linguistic difference in most cases would be obvious to any speaker, the philologist, Grimm believed, could reliably discern what was and was not genuinely German – hence the need for his expertise. According to Grimm and his peers in early historical linguistics, language was an organized body of sounds, and individual (Germanic) languages had achieved distinctiveness in comparison with others by moving through series of phonetic shifts over time.²⁷ For instance, the *Tu* of Latin had become the *Thu* of Gothic and later the *Du* of Old High German, a sequence that displayed a regular, patterned progression from T to TH to D across the vocabulary.²⁸ Such modifications revealed an internal principle of evolution in language, a veritable law,²⁹ but they simultaneously indexed, Grimm believed, the gradual differentiation of communities from some earlier group.³⁰ Among Germanic languages, High German had experienced a so-called second shift, and this change also marked a difference between the German and North-Germanic or Nordic peoples, among them the Danes. (The designation of the peoples was itself a contentious issue, with Grimm consistently and imperiously proposing the name German or *deutsch* for all groups we would today call Germanic – Grimm fairly transparently used the term to suggest the centrality of German over supposedly subaltern languages.³¹) Degrees of structured “slippages” in phonology³² indicated the difference among affiliated languages, and hence also among communities – peoples – that had diverged over time. Close scholarly attention to diachronically developed, empirically observable grammatical differences thus allowed the philologist, Grimm thought, to discern distinctions among nations and authorized him to separate them from one another.

When it came to distinguishing Germans from Danes – the most pressing question of the mid-1840s and at the first convention of the Germanists – Grimm went back and forth on how close or distant the languages were. In the edition of his grammar that appeared about half a decade before the Frankfurt conference, he assumed a fundamental split between Nordic languages, spoken in Scandinavia, and other German languages.³³ Grammatical features such as definite articles attached as suffixes to words were typical of Nordic languages and not shared by German (*the* bread is “*das* Brot” in German but “*brødet*” in Danish and “*brödet*” in Swedish). But in a major publication on linguistic history two years after the meeting, he downplayed this distinction between German and Nordic somewhat and emphasized the genetic unity of all Germanic

idioms; their differential traits were fairly late divergences. Regardless of his scholarly position at any given time, however, Grimm believed himself to be in possession of tools of discrimination; distinctions between nations, he held, must ultimately be performed on the basis of observations of grammatical developments, which was the field of expertise of philologists who tracked linguistic changes in surviving textual sources. The philologist best understood the “fixed rules [*feste Regeln*]” that governed the “unfolding of the German tongue [*Entfaltungen deutscher Zunge*].”³⁴

When Grimm defined peoples as linguistic communities and suggested grammatical criteria to discern their boundaries, he also presented the comparative scholarship of individuated languages and their distinctive traits as an instrument of political boundary drawing. Rivers and mountain ranges may seem to separate groups, Grimm noted in his opening address to the Germanists, but topography alone did not delimit peoplehood. If groups on both sides of some conspicuous geographical edge were found to speak the same language, they belonged to one and the same people; “language alone,” Grimm claimed, could “determine a border [*die Grenze setzen*]” and hence help delineate, in a dependable fashion, the size and shape of a national territory.³⁵ Political units and their territorial outlines should, Grimm continued more allusively, be made to correspond to the habitats of peoples, that is, to groups of individuals whose common tongue constituted indisputable proof of their cohesiveness. The possibly distant but nonetheless inevitable future would be one in which all arbitrary “barriers [*Schranken*]” had fallen and the imperfect spatial order of the present had been dissolved as a distraction from the histories of actual peoples.³⁶ Once states had become coextensive with spoken languages and hence with peoples, political borders would shed their current arbitrariness and attain a natural validity.³⁷

Grimm assumed that particular patterns of linguistic difference were coterminous with national divisions that in turn had to be politically and territorially honored; insights into the “innermost household”³⁸ of languages as self-sufficient, rule-governed systems of sound ultimately yielded political imperatives. Grimm himself assumed that there was a continuum between his scholarly work and political engagement, and the terms he used in his writings on grammar could appear in public declarations made with a political intent. An example would be the obviously charged distinction German and “un-German,” *deutsch* and *undeutsch*. With an understanding of orderly, lawlike phonetic transformations, Grimm was able to trace the journey of individual words through patterned sound shifts, such as the Latin *Pater* and the German *Vater*, and distinguish cases

of actual identity of words across related languages from merely accidental likenesses.³⁹ He could also recognize the words that had gone through the process of shifts and thus truly belonged to the linguistic organism (such as the German *Vater*), and those that had arrived at some later date and hence had not been modified (such as the German *Patriotismus*), remaining visible as later imports. No linguist before Grimm, the intellectual historian Sarah Pourciau writes, had been able to draw “so definite a distinction between inside and out.”⁴⁰ Guided by his comprehension of systematic phonetic transformations, Grimm believed he could spot authentically German words in contrast to more recent loanwords; some expressions were, he declared in his 1822 grammar, simply “un-German [*undeutsch*].”⁴¹

To Grimm, however, this rigorously grounded detection of what did and did not belong to the core German lexicon represented a particularly clear and validating example of a more general sense of what did and did not constitute German national culture, and ultimately also what was and was not fitting and conducive to the German people in the realm of politics. In Grimm’s view, his grasp of the nation-grounding German language in its freely developing organic unity and the related wholeness of the German people even permitted him to render judgment on particular rulers and governmental actions, insofar as they respected or neglected, strengthened or weakened, the unity and autonomy of Germany. Grimm could speak dismissively of a king who did not appropriately honor the German language⁴² and condemn a state policy that did not further the cause of the unification of German-speaking populations in different areas⁴³ on the grounds that they were manifestly *undeutsch* – un-German. As a particularly well-informed and dedicated student of the linguistically defined nation and its particular history and culture, Grimm thus thought that the philologist could claim the authority to comment on political rule; he possessed a vantage point and a measuring instrument by which to assess the politics of the day. A king or regime, and most importantly the shape of a territory or unit of governance, had to be in conformity with the character of the nation, and the philologist possessed the competence to determine whether or not this requirement had been satisfied – whether something was German or un-German.

There were examples of Grimm’s self-confident assumptions in the 1846 inaugural address. He ended his opening speech to the assembled Germanists by turning to the city chosen for their first convention: Frankfurt am Main. Jacob Grimm reminded his audience that Frankfurt had been the historical center of German imperial rule and hence stood as a reminder of past German interconnection and unity.⁴⁴ Charlemagne had

once wandered the streets of Frankfurt, Grimm noted, and people had often looked to the city in anxious anticipation of decisions determining the fate of Germany.⁴⁵ The Germanists were even gathering in the Kaisersaal or Emperor Hall in the Römer, a Medieval building that had once been the site of coronation banquets during the Holy Roman Empire.⁴⁶ As the chairman of the meeting, Grimm was seated directly under a portrait of Maximilian I,⁴⁷ the Holy Roman Emperor from 1508 to 1519. In “spaces such as these,” Grimm then concluded in the very final line of his address, “only German things should transpire and nothing un-German! [*in solchen räumen darf nur deutsches, und nicht undeutsches geschehen!*].”⁴⁸ Invoking a history of imperial German rule at the end of his talk, Grimm restated his belief in the possibility of distinguishing between the inside and outside of the German nation. This was the special competency of the Germanists – they could tell the German apart from the un-German, a skill guaranteed by their linguistic insight.

Grimm’s ending exhortation was a fitting introduction to the general business of the congress; the Germanists were focused on determining the proper boundaries of Germany, especially so on the first day. Immediately following Grimm’s opening address to his fellow scholars were a series of lectures and debates about Schleswig and Holstein, the focal point of German nationalist efforts around the time of the congress, the perceived test case for German unification in the late 1840s, and possibly the first nationalist cause to generate a wider and more genuine public resonance.⁴⁹ The conflict with Denmark over the two duchies would later prove to be the dominant and most difficult foreign policy problem to be dealt with by the new German national parliament two years later, in 1848.⁵⁰ During the opening day of the Germanist association, all five featured speakers defended the German claim to the duchies using different legal, cultural, and linguistic arguments for the incorporation of Schleswig and Holstein into a German political structure.⁵¹ Grimm did not give one of these lectures, but he would, over the next four to five years, prove to be an intransigent advocate of the struggle against any attempt by the Danish crown to tie the duchies closer to Denmark, even as this stance caused friction with the monarchical Prussian government from which he received financial support.⁵²

Grimm’s engagement in the cause of the two duchies, based as it was in his belief that he could discern the boundaries of people and adjudicate claims over lands, was not an isolated campaign in his life. He had, throughout his career, commented on whether or not some population or strip of land was German. When he was working as a secretary of the

Hessian delegation to the Congress of Vienna in 1814 and 1815, the young Jacob Grimm declared himself opposed to Prussian dominance over Poles. It would be fair, just, and right, he wrote to his brother Wilhelm from Vienna in 1814, to grant the Poles freedom and independence rather than wish for their integration under Prussian rule; they had been shamelessly divided and humiliated.⁵³ He voiced similar positions publicly in the magazine *Rheinischer Merkur*.⁵⁴ Poland was not part of Germany, Grimm wrote in a dispatch, and Prussia would not be stronger for housing one million Poles.⁵⁵ Concerned with the form and cohesion of culturally and linguistically German principalities, the young Hessian Grimm held distinctly “un-Prussian” views.⁵⁶

However, the question of national delineation was not always so clear-cut. In another article published in *Rheinischer Merkur* in the fall of 1814, Grimm tackled the issue of Alsace, a province wedged between German lands and France. While he noted the preference of the Alsatians to be French citizens rather than the subjects of a smaller German principality, he could not accept this as a permanent arrangement, since the Alsatians were, in his mind, indisputably German, linguistically and culturally: “those who speak our language are part of our body and blood and can be called un-German but never become un-German [*unsere sprache redet, ist unseres leibs und bluts und kann undeutsch heissen, allein nicht undeutsch werden*].”⁵⁷ Alsatians were Germans and must at some point join Germany, when the political situations had improved. Linguistic and cultural belonging to a nation ought to trump civic attachment.

Long before the ethnic and linguistic character of Schleswig and Holstein had become a widely discussed topic in German-language media and began to fuel a more broadly based national movement, Grimm had started to develop and publicize his philological approach to European geopolitics. As early as in his twenties, he presented himself as competent to declare who was German, which territories a German king must rule, and which should be respected as non-German. Grimm’s attempt to anchor political claims in investigations into linguistic history did not necessarily help him settle borders once and for all. In his 1846 address, Grimm drew on his path-breaking research of linguistic change over time to paint an image of languages as plastic organisms. Languages, Grimm claimed, moved through series of alterations that marked them out as distinct, but they could also expand and contract, rise and fall, and some languages had vanished completely while new ones had emerged. The Gothic language had died out, as had the Frankish tongue, although many Germanic words survived in the French language. By contrast,

English clearly was a Germanic language, although it had absorbed a Romance lexicon so extensive that Grimm viewed the resulting idiom a “wondrous mixture,” one that already in his time seemed poised for “world domination.”⁵⁸ His brief comment seems to suggest that a language that could not quite be contained within his grammatical categories would also not remain within the boundaries of a particular location; the mixed language of English would expand far beyond any national frontiers. German, finally, had itself undergone dramatic transformations, and Grimm related how dialects had retreated over time, in large part due to the hegemony of one standardized written language initially forged by Martin Luther. Grimm thus reported on how languages had evolved, atrophied, or become standardized, appeared and disappeared in history, which also had to mean that linguistically defined peoples were not eternally stable.

For Grimm, the record of linguistic change, including the deaths and births of entire languages, did not mean that rulers, administrators, or scholars ever had the right or even the opportunity to shape peoples. The languages that defined peoplehood could not be successfully created, constructed, or purified from above; the evident long-term plasticity of languages did not authorize the present generation to try to roll back past foreign influence, regrettable as this influence might have been. To Grimm, it would be both rash and futile to seek to redeem the English language by ripping out the Romance vocabulary.⁵⁹ Analogously, the introduction of Roman law in Germanic lands may once have done damage to a native tradition, but the development could hardly be reversed; uncompromising legal purism struck Grimm as impossible, even “unbearable.”⁶⁰ When dealing with complex, historically shaped systems such as languages or bodies of law, Grimm indicated, one needed to practice a sensitive and patient gradualism, preserve what seemed valuable from the standpoint of “purity” but avoid the crudeness and clumsiness of willed human interventions into delicate organisms.⁶¹ When Grimm asserted that the political and territorial unit must be anchored in the linguistic and cultural one, he did not rule out future geographic adjustments to further linguistic shifts, and when he urged caution against any organized campaigns of linguistic and cultural cleansing, he showed himself tolerant of past incursions and entanglements.

It is against the backdrop of these claims about language and nationhood that one can begin to understand the self-appointed political task of the philologist. Grimm believed that German philology, equipped with detailed knowledge of the distinguishing features of languages and nations

with particular histories and locations, could help redraw the boundaries of Central Europe so that they would better reflect the actual geo-linguistic landscape. Territories ought to be determined by the homelands of linguistically defined peoples, not by the relative power of regionally dominant princes, the imperial expansion of strong states, or even by the civic attachment of a particular group to a state. To Grimm, the assembly of German historians, jurists, and linguists knew the cultural community most intimately, loved it most ardently, and was called to defend its integrity but do so without ignoring or seeking to annul a long history of importations and influences. As a self-consciously non-regional, proudly national institution, the association of scholars itself even seemed to foreshadow the future integration of larger German communities into one non-arbitrary political body.⁶²

Given Grimm's argument, one might expect him to conclude his address with a final celebration of the philologist's indispensability to politics. Choosing a more cautious approach, however, he instead emphasized the separation of knowledge and rule, *Wissenschaft* and political battles. The meetings of the Germanists, he said at the end of his address, would not be able to make any decisions and they had to remain distant from "actual politics [*eigentliche Politik*]," although the questions that emerged in the fields of history, law, and linguistics "naturally and inevitably" would touch on political topics.⁶³ There were likely several reasons for Grimm's reticence: an equation of politics with decision-making, a concern for the particular character and integrity of research, and perhaps a tactical caution in anticipation of censorial interventions by authorities.⁶⁴ Yet the claim that scholarly pursuits must remain at a distance from politics clearly did not mean that they had no political consequences. Grimm's bundle of ideas – that linguistic boundaries could be precisely observed, that spoken languages defined peoples,⁶⁵ and that the geographic distribution of linguistically defined peoples ought to determine territorial borders – would, if implemented, have undermined the political order of his day. A German political body that would mirror a putative linguistic and cultural unity would entail the delegitimization of local princely rule in the plurality of German states, the dismantling of multinational configurations such as the Habsburg or Ottoman Empire, and a consequent destabilization of the European balance of power.⁶⁶ These potential implications were to some extent also debated at the conference. The philologist was a guardian of *national* self-determination, a figure whose expert advice could allow for the proper exercise of rule grounded in linguistic and

cultural facts, but because of this national focus, the Germanist philologist was also a figure of disruption, even a harbinger of war.

Popular Sovereignty, National Particularism, and Territorial Rights

The Germanist congress of 1846 did not only feature discussions of grammar, Medieval German literature, German history, or legal antiquities; it was not a purely academic affair. The initial debate about the German character of the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, as well as discussions about German migration to America on the third day of the Frankfurt congress or German settlements in Eastern Europe at the second Germanist congress in Lübeck in 1847, made it clear that the scholars were preoccupied with groups and lands, populations and territories, which were eminently political and geopolitical concerns. In his opening Frankfurt address, Grimm conveyed his belief that Germans formed one national community that ought to be unified and self-ruling, neither internally divided into many principalities nor dominated by a foreign power within a polyethnic empire, and that the location of that national community should dictate territorial borders. The congress was not just a first scholarly event at the national level, but a nationalist manifestation.

When Grimm posed his “simple” question – *what is a people?* – he believed that he could provide a definitive and authoritative answer as a scholar or disinterested *Wissenschaftler*; yet, he was aware that the question itself and the implications of his answer were not apolitical. The concern with what a people might be had become so urgent, so unavoidable, because the “people” had emerged as a central political figure during his lifetime,⁶⁷ for some even a unitary agent capable of empowering and constraining governments,⁶⁸ and it had to be recognized and even delineated sharply and convincingly for the sake of establishing a legitimate political order. In Grimm’s view, the philologist stepped in to specify the people in an era in which such a specification had become absolutely necessary because of the political import of the concept – or fiction⁶⁹ – of the people. Philology, Grimm believed, could satisfy a pressing political need.

Born in 1785, Jacob Grimm came of age after the French Revolution, and he followed and participated in the politics of his day. To name just a few important episodes of his life that we will later revisit in greater detail, Grimm was a civil servant in his hometown Kassel under a French king in a French administration (1807–1814), worked as a delegation secretary for

the restored Electorate of Hesse at the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815), lost his post as a state-employed professor when he challenged the decrees of a new king of Hanover together with a group of academics in Göttingen (1837), and went to Frankfurt as an elected representative in the first German parliament (1848). Grimm thus experienced firsthand the Napoleonic conquest of German principalities, the post-Napoleonic restoration and reordering of Europe, the long and frustrated struggle for constitutionalized monarchies throughout the German Confederation, and the attempt to establish as well as the failure to maintain the first German national parliament. While not an outspoken democrat⁷⁰ or especially interested in clearly defined liberal civil rights,⁷¹ and certainly reluctant to consider a full-fledged alternative to royal power, Grimm believed that the legitimacy of any monarch ultimately depended on rule being sensitive to the culturally formed preferences and habits of a delimited people.

To Grimm, the king or prince did not “stand above” a people given shape solely through its subjection to a patrimonial or religiously justified government, but rather ruled legitimately by standing at the people’s “helm,” as its dedicated and knowledgeable guardian and fitting representative.⁷² No prince was simply a “sovereign [*souverän*],” and the word itself was clearly French and hence, of course, “un-German.”⁷³ Neither a champion of popular sovereignty enmeshed in post-revolutionary political philosophy nor simply an ethnic chauvinist with expansionary plans and little concern for the acceptance of the governed or subjugated, Grimm considered the national people the fundamental political unit, which must be properly accommodated and expressed in any valid order; politics should ultimately provide an appropriate external arrangement for a national group already revealed in language and culture.⁷⁴ The principle of monarchical rule was, for him, not in question, but a kingdom had to match the outlines of a nation, and a ruler ought to respect the nation’s character and cultivate an interest in its cultural particularity. Ideally, a German king should think and feel like a German philologist, or at the very least use his position to promote the cultural and linguistic inheritance of the homeland rather than hold up foreign cultures as models and spend excessive sums on alien prestige objects such as Italian paintings or Greek statues.⁷⁵

Grimm’s position represented an alliance between a moderated or muted version of a post-revolutionary and hence more broadly popular politics, on the one hand, and historicist cultural particularism, on the other. Grimm did believe that rule could only obtain legitimacy when it was plausibly exercised in the name of people, but he also held that this

now politicized people must first and foremost be construed as a historically formed linguistic and cultural community. It was the combination of these two principles that assigned a unique political task for the philologist: if rule had to reckon with the people, and the people was a historically formed linguistic collective, then the philologically trained scholar was especially well positioned to delimit it, which included tracing its spatial contours. The combined requirements of popular legitimacy and cultural-linguistic peoplehood entailed a philologization of politics. It was the philologist, Grimm believed, who could demarcate the people by clarifying and applying criteria for membership. In this way, the philologist would even be able to address a problem of determination that followed from the internal logic of popular sovereignty, for the idea of the people as the source of legitimate political authority had inevitably generated a question that proved quite hard to answer, namely the question of what a people *was*. This was of course precisely Grimm's question: *what is a people?*

How did the notion of popular sovereignty give rise to a problem of determination? A synoptic overview of the post-revolutionary preoccupation with the *boundary* of the people will help us understand the problem that Jacob Grimm sought to solve by philological means. The principal political organization of Grimm's place and time, early nineteenth-century Europe, was the state,⁷⁶ a relatively centralized entity, differentiated from other, subordinate organizations, with control over the means of physical coercion in a defined area, and generally headed by a king or prince.⁷⁷ The state was at its core a claimant or master of a territory,⁷⁸ and its size ultimately corresponded to its ability to hold on to land with military means. These spatial boundaries were not necessarily understood as rooted in the geographic distribution of a language or the ethnic character of a people, and they were ultimately determined by the state's capacity to defend the area.⁷⁹ Within this territory, its rule was meant to be unrivaled; it possessed sovereignty understood as the undivided and unchallenged right and ability to command.⁸⁰

The French Revolution mounted a successful challenge to absolutism, the exercise of rule by a monarch in control of a centralized machinery of administration for connected activities such as taxation, diplomacy, and warfare. However, even as the revolution assailed royal rule, it did not dissolve the state's territorial integrity and let regions and districts revert into localism. Rather, new elites inherited the state's existing borders.⁸¹ While personal rule by the monarch was transformed by a vision of collectively authorized rule, the paradigm of supreme command within

a delimited space remained in place. The absolutist achievement of centralized command and territorial consolidation was seized and, in a sense, retroactively legitimized in the name of the people. Article 3 of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen declared that the principle of all sovereignty resided essentially in the nation; no individual or group of individuals was entitled to a decision-making authority that was not ultimately derived from the people as a whole.⁸² The declaration did not inaugurate a direct collective rule, but rather it installed the people as the figure with the ultimate power to establish and disestablish rule and the right to grant a mandate to the state's government.⁸³

In the aftermath of the revolution, many educated and well-informed bourgeois subjects ceased to view royal rule as divinely ordained, with a king self-evidently standing above a population as its patrimonial lord.⁸⁴ The post-revolutionary public instead believed that the people could confer legitimacy on constitutions, regimes, and territorial boundaries.⁸⁵ But if the state ultimately derived its authority from the people, then the people had to be imagined as in some sense prior to that state and not as its product or effect. The appeal to the people in the context of undivided sovereignty implied the existence of unified and unitary community⁸⁶ that had existed *before* the constituted authority of the state and its agents,⁸⁷ a pre-political unity that had preceded but also would survive any given regime that aspired to rule in its name.

The people's boundaries could, according to this logic, not be the result of a decision made in the realm of politics,⁸⁸ because no king or government could ever possess the authority to impose or determine such boundaries. A people that would somehow have acquired a definite outline only through the ordering efforts of an apparatus or the commands of a king could also have been shaped in some other way and then contain other sets of members. In that case, political rule would have created the conditions of its own supposed legitimacy; the game would be rigged. Only an already existing collective could avoid entering into the circle in which political power defined or produced the human collective that then was asked to ratify its own subjection.⁸⁹

In the age of popular sovereignty, then, the people's identity could not be an effect of a political imposition by a king with the right to rule over his subjects. Nor could the people's cohesion be a result of a democratic procedure, a conscious, voluntary, and fully collective decision to form a new people. This would generate another circle, for a people as a *demos* could not somehow have arrived at a resolution about its own contours and its own criteria of membership without already having presupposed these

contours and criteria in the very act of the collective decision.⁹⁰ Again, the people must have already possessed a definite form and discernible outlines. In this way, post-revolutionary sovereignty required the people to be determinate rather than undefined, natural rather than fabricated, historically deep rather than recently conjured; the people had to possess its very own bounded unity before the advent of any regime claiming to represent it.

How, then, could the people be determined or discovered? How could one delineate its shape and unity without compromising the necessary fiction of its natural and independent character? In the early decades of the nineteenth century, nationalists believed they could answer this question. After the revolution, the necessity of specifying the boundaries of the people led them to identify the all-important but elusive *demos* with the cultural *nation* defined as a community of kin united by its language, shared culture, or ethnic traits.⁹¹ Attention to a common language, common practices, customs, and traditions would help mark out a stable and exclusive community that had existed and would continue to exist in a recognizable form regardless of any one particular ruler or form of regime. The new legitimating fiction of the sovereign people could attain the requisite temporal depth and communal closure, but only when imagined ethnically and culturally as a nation.

As a collector of the words, tales, laws, and myths of the German nation, Jacob Grimm tirelessly promoted the nationalist resolution of the post-revolutionary boundary problem in the German context. For him, the people as a political unit should be understood as synonymous with the national community, the identity and coherence of which was abundantly manifest in its language, literature, inherited legal corpus, and ancient mythical beliefs. The people were, for Grimm, not a voluntary or contractual association,⁹² and certainly not a unitary collective agent looking to expand and dominate its surroundings. Instead, it was an evolved, natural community whose proudest but also “most innocent” shared property, its language, could be expertly mapped by the philologist.⁹³ The urgent political question of what made a people could, Grimm thought, be conclusively answered, because the philologist could identify its borders grammatically and hence methodically and precisely. In a situation in which the idea of the people as sovereign fused with the idea of the people as a bounded nation,⁹⁴ the philologist scholar could advance into the position of an expert arbiter of state boundaries and claim that every regime would need philological support and advice.

Grimm ultimately relied on several interconnected ideas: heads of state only ruled legitimately in the name of the people; the contours of the people were determined by the shape of nationhood; nationhood could be traced by the philologist; and, finally, the state's area of exclusive jurisdiction should coincide with the existing national homeland. No territorial unit could, in Grimm's implicit view, be understood as the inheritable property of a dynastic king.⁹⁵ In the German context, this was a radical position, since it suggested the impracticality and redundancy of the remaining micro-principalities; the independently defined German nation should determine the shape of the state and not local princely rule.⁹⁶ However, the notion of popular-national sovereignty also generated a particular conception of a people's relationship to a tract of the earth, a kind of territorialization of the community.⁹⁷ Armed states were masters of territory, but the people was the ultimate source of the state's authority; combined, these two claims singled out the people as the exclusive master of a territory.⁹⁸ It was the nation, and not the king, dynasty, or government, that emerged as the legitimate possessor of an inalienable communal land⁹⁹ and the spatial frontiers of the state had to correspond to the boundaries of the people.¹⁰⁰ Any apparent arbitrariness to borders was eliminated, or concealed, once territories were viewed not as the results of a history of political conquest and conflict but as ancient habitats of national communities entitled to the land they occupied.¹⁰¹ The external frontiers of a state could, in Grimm's view, be imagined as the natural edges of a distinct transgenerational community, as the outlines of the place where the national people was "at home."¹⁰²

Grimm's 1846 Frankfurt address on the people encapsulated a nationalization of the sovereign political community and an associated culturalization or ethnicization of its territorial claims.¹⁰³ In Grimm's eyes, the right of any state to its boundaries was justified by the prior collective occupancy of a philologically circumscribed national people.¹⁰⁴ Posing the question of the people before his fellow Germanists, Grimm explicitly defined it as a nation bound together by the common language and surrounded by other groups with different although historically affiliated tongues. According to him, the nation was not the outcome of an imposition from a center of political agency or any kind of conscious decision but had grown naturally and spontaneously and could not be transformed at will. The nation presented the world with a common social life that did not emanate from or depend on rulers but whose integrity and spatial distribution should instead be respected by them. To enable such respect, Grimm also asserted that the people was eminently determinable and

that the philologist could perform this determination, as well as defend and justify it, should it be denied or disputed. Specifically, he arrived at a subdivision of European peoples into geographically localizable groups (German, Dutch, French, English, Scandinavian, etc.) through his study of systemic grammatical shifts over time, which meant, to him, that the demarcation of peoples could claim for itself the validity and reliability of a scholarly finding. The philologist's empirically grounded delineation of nationhood on the basis of linguistic and historical fact, he assumed, protected the judgment from contamination by petty interests. Philological judgment only tracked independently specifiable linguistic and cultural properties of nations and in this way established the all-important pre-political ground for legitimate politics.¹⁰⁵ Modern rule by sovereign states required a delineation of the people in time and in space, and the discriminating philologist, Grimm thought, could identify a collective identity, a coherent, unified *Volk*, which would not be synonymous with tumultuous masses or a rowdy populace.¹⁰⁶

To summarize the steps of Grimm's argument: genuine political legitimacy required a rule anchored in the people; the politically foundational people required definite cultural and spatial boundaries; the boundaries were given by the diffusion of languages in space, each one with a limited reach; linguistic tracing, which should dictate territorial boundary drawing, required finely tuned observations of lawlike grammatical patterns; and the epistemic authority to draw these boundaries was ensured by disciplinary methods. On the strength of this argument, Grimm's Germanist philologist stepped into the political arena, not to take charge, not to exercise power, not to question or subvert the monarchical order, but to demarcate the proper unit of constitutionally constrained but nonetheless continued, re-legitimated, and territorially consolidated royal rule. This explains why the first day of the Germanist congress was devoted not to linguistic findings, historical sources, methodological debates, or future collaborative projects, but to the dispute over the status of Schleswig and Holstein, to a conflict over land and habitats.

Recent historical scholarship has been uncomfortable with the entanglement of popular sovereignty and nationhood and has sought to challenge the notion that a revolutionary and more democratic age must allow nation-states to emerge from dissolving empires; empires were more adaptable and less doomed than previously acknowledged, and supposedly national peoples more mutable and unfinished.¹⁰⁷ Grimm himself was clearly a promoter of the story of national resurgence and imperial demise. His presentation of the politically active philologist was, it should also be

added, a peculiarly German performance. Among the revolutionaries in France, many had indeed rejected the idea of bounded nations, each living its separate life under its own regime. The petty care for one's nation should not, Jacobins would argue, take the place of one's commitment to the greater brotherhood of humanity.¹⁰⁸ The logical aim of a revolution ought to be a morally unified world rather than an ethnically provincialized one, a rousing vision with supporters all over Europe, including the German principalities.¹⁰⁹

It was precisely this universalist vision, however, that some Germans came to reject, among them Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, who witnessed the French move into their hometown Kassel in 1806 and then lived and worked under the rule of Napoleon's brother Jérôme until 1813, with Kassel as the capital of the newly constructed Kingdom of Westphalia. The collapse of the Holy Roman Empire and the fact of French rule¹¹⁰ convinced them and many of their generational peers that the universalist vision of humankind's liberation could end with a coercive regime installed by an arrogant power over more fragmented lands.¹¹¹ Nationalism was a resentful response to the condescension of an occupier,¹¹² and Jacob Grimm wrote in 1814 of the hatred that he considered the "natural response [*natürliche rückwirkung*]" to the coercive pressure of a foreign regime.¹¹³ For the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (born 1770) or the influential literary critic Friedrich Schlegel (born 1772), the French Revolution had been a formative and exciting historical moment,¹¹⁴ but Grimm, born a little more than a decade later than these luminaries, was shaped more by the experience of the subsequent Napoleonic conquest and hegemony. To him, the supposed emancipation and progress of humanity had revealed itself, locally, as French domination over German lands.¹¹⁵

French rule certainly meant modernization – in the form of the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, the consolidation of many small principalities into larger units, the introduction of a rationalized legal code, as well as a more uniform and meritocratic system of administration.¹¹⁶ Napoleon himself believed, with respect to Westphalia, that German populations would come to appreciate the benefits of the new order and approve of French rule.¹¹⁷ Yet the perception of exploitative French rule motivated the Grimms to explore the particularity of their own nationality, insufficiently modern as it may have been. The brothers' entire philological output, the compilations of folktales, legends, heroic epics, myths, and legal antiquities as well as the construction of a record of linguistic change, was meant to demonstrate the existence of a Germanic cultural tradition expressive of an autonomous and distinctive social life. The recovery of the deep vernacular

past was a reaction to a universalism that had arrived in the form of foreign superiority.¹¹⁸

Despite this apparently retrograde turn to the ancient past, Jacob Grimm was not simply a political conservative. Without endorsing a principle, he nonetheless implicitly accepted the premise that rule must be anchored in the people, hardly a reactionary tenet. By the 1840s, Grimm, once a locally oriented, Hessian patriot, had effectively come to support the construction of a larger and more centralized state, a state that would coincide with the larger German community: the extent of the nation demanded the elimination of autocratic micro-states.¹¹⁹ As we have seen, however, Grimm continued to refuse politically enforced universalistic visions. In his hands, the philologically conducted nationalization of the people was meant to delimit rule and render it legitimate in a way that resisted the erasure of all cultural individuality in the name of a unified, undifferentiated humanity.¹²⁰ Grimm invoked the language and culture of the nation to give plausible shape to a people as a political unit, but he also asserted the nation's integrity against a form of rule that justified itself through claims to greater rationality and efficiency. Through this fusion of a post-revolutionary conception of sovereignty and national particularism, the rule of the people could only occur when ruler and ruled hail from the same cultural community, and, as the guardian of cultural and linguistic togetherness, the philologist emerged as the figure who best knew when this identity of ruler and subjects had been authentically achieved. Grimm believed that philology, a discipline that "naturally and inevitably" touched on political matters, could facilitate the formation of a legitimate government.

The Philologist at War

Nationalists such as Grimm propounded a modern geopolitical vision: Europe ought to be divided into states that would coincide with national peoples defined by their languages, common cultures, and shared histories. This was a challenge to the early nineteenth-century elite representatives of the old European order, few of whom attached any political significance to the nationality or ethnicity of broad segments of the population. Multilingual and multiethnic empires clearly did not stand to benefit from making language and nation the criteria of political boundary drawing:¹²¹ the Habsburgs famously ruled over "Magyars and Croats, Slovaks and Italians, Ukrainians and Austro-Germans."¹²² Ethnic settlement all over Europe was often quite dispersed,¹²³ and linguistic communities frequently overlapped

spatially. Territories could be linguistically mixed, with diverse groups dwelling side by side rather than cleanly concentrated in separate areas.¹²⁴ The world was culturally messier than Grimm may have wanted to admit.

Grimm's equation of language and territory rested on several assumptions: that individuals, however polyglot, possessed one mother tongue; that they consequently belonged to one and only one people; and that the people constituted a fairly homogeneous and cohesive group that inhabited a definable area. This collective then qualified as the master of a territory, over which it possessed some form of collective ownership by virtue of its enduring occupancy.¹²⁵ Grimm's vision effectively implied the need to put an end to actual multilingualistic regions and multinational co-dwelling, since the close coexistence of languages would impede the formation of a national polity.¹²⁶ Nationalists like Grimm tended to demand not just the devolution of empires but also at least implicitly the requirement of coercive forms of "depluralization"¹²⁷ or homogenization of linguistically and culturally varied territories. Philologists who put their scholarly knowledge of linguistic and cultural differences in the service of the nationalist cause ultimately called for sharper political and territorial divisions in a context where cultures shaded into one another and people were accustomed to complex patterns of language use such as bilingualism and diglossia.¹²⁸ The post-revolutionary shift in the conception of political legitimacy, exemplified here by Grimm's approach, redefined political membership and re-specified political collectivities, transformations that could not fail to unleash conflicts and impose exclusions.¹²⁹

There were several culturally and linguistically jumbled areas in central Europe in Grimm's time, places with "soft borders" between populations,¹³⁰ and nationalists instigated hostilities in more than one of them. The most fervently debated sites of national conflict around the time of the Germanist convention in 1846, were, once again, the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein; the inhabitants of Schleswig spoke German and Danish in roughly equal proportions.¹³¹ This area in between Scandinavia and Germany became the object of German but also Danish campaigns for nation building¹³² and as such the primary location for a fairly novel type of antagonism, namely the one between competing nationalisms.¹³³ The German nationalists did not always honestly admit the reality of linguistically heterogeneous populations; many came close to denying that there were native speakers of Danish in Schleswig.¹³⁴

The legal and political situation in Schleswig and Holstein was exceedingly complex. The duchies had been ruled by the Danish crown since

1460¹³⁵ but were locally nevertheless dominated by the landed aristocracy, which was German. Traditions and languages were entangled: the ruling Danish royal family was a German dynasty; German aristocrats and civil servants played an influential political and cultural role in Copenhagen, the Danish capital;¹³⁶ and German also served as the primary language in religious services, even for the Danish-speaking population of Schleswig.¹³⁷ Politically, the two territories were both divided and closely tied to each other. Holstein was part of the German Confederation, but Schleswig was not, and yet the two were united under Danish rule. According to German scholars, legal documents from earlier centuries established the indissoluble connection of the two duchies.¹³⁸ The discussion of rightful rule became further complicated with disputes over the principles governing the inheritance of the throne. Danish law allowed for succession along the female line, whereas Holstein, following an ancient Frankish legal code, did not. The matter of agnatic or cognatic succession came to the forefront in the 1840s since contemporaries could anticipate a future without male heirs descended from a Danish king; the Danish royal family faced a “serious long-term problem.”¹³⁹ If female succession prevailed, the Danish crown could hold on to the duchies further into the future; if the inheritance was restricted to males in Holstein, however, Danish rule in the duchy might come to an end. As a result, the clashing campaigns for conversion of the duchies into either Danish or German national areas were partly conducted with obscure legal arguments.

The tangle of linguistic, cultural, legal, and political factors did not deter the Germanists gathered in Frankfurt in 1846. In fact, the philologists and jurists excelled precisely at mobilizing arcane linguistic and legal history to prove the essentially German character of Schleswig and Holstein and supply a scholarly justification for a nationalist challenge to Danish authority. As mentioned, the first day out of three was exclusively devoted to the topic and the agenda of the presenters was entirely partisan; speakers offered arguments against Danish rule to shore up an already existing consensus. Some of the academics who delivered speeches after Jacob Grimm’s introductory address were even veterans of the Schleswig-Holstein conflict, men with family backgrounds in the area and a long history of making the case for German hegemony.

One of the most prominent of the five scheduled presenters was the historian and political scientist Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann (1785–1860), a close friend and ally of Jacob Grimm since their days as colleagues at the University of Göttingen in the 1830s. In Hanover, Dahlmann and Grimm had both protested King Ernst August’s abrogation of the recently

adopted constitution, both lost their positions and were exiled, and then both were celebrated and vilified as icons of German liberalism.¹⁴⁰ By the time of the Germanist convention, Dahlmann had fought for a national conception of the duchies for about three decades; he was truly an insider of the German nationalist campaign. Born in Swedish Wismar in 1785, he studied in Copenhagen and Halle; lectured in the Danish capital; and became a professor in Kiel, the university of Holstein, between 1812 and 1829, where he also served as the secretary of the deputation of the German nobility and clergy of Schleswig-Holstein.¹⁴¹ In his youth, Dahlmann had been an intimate friend of one of German literary history's most passionate nationalists, Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811), and both had been committed to German resistance to the French. During his long academic career, however, he emerged as a more moderate liberal nationalist who held that peoples should live in nationally based constitutional monarchies.¹⁴²

As a representative of the landed aristocracy in their drawn-out tug of war with the Danish crown, Dahlmann had been tasked with the defense of the nobility's economic and political interests, which were not necessarily nationalist in character but often collided with those of a centralizing Danish crown.¹⁴³ In this position, however, Dahlmann had begun constructing historical arguments against the solidification of Danish power.¹⁴⁴ A classical philologist by training and a historian by profession, he retrieved and interpreted historical documents on the basis of which he argued that the aristocracy was independent from the Danish crown and that the arguably inseparable duchies therefore ought to enjoy autonomy.¹⁴⁵ He was a liberal nationalist using philological discoveries to deploy the duchies' aristocratic history against the Danish king.¹⁴⁶

In Frankfurt am Main in 1846, Dahlmann went to the podium as one of the last to speak during the first day, and he chose to give a more personal and anecdotal presentation. The inhabitants of Schleswig did speak Danish, he conceded, but only a decayed dialect, and Luther's Bible German had spread peacefully throughout the region.¹⁴⁷ Even Danish speakers, he continued, went to German mass and studied in the German town Kiel, not in the Danish capital Copenhagen.¹⁴⁸ Dahlmann's sketch, self-serving as it may have been, fit Jacob Grimm's opening address. While Grimm posited the unity of language, people, and territory in Northern and Western Europe more generally, Dahlmann tackled the specific case under debate and argued that High German was firmly established as the predominant language of faith and learning in the churches and at the university, two key institutions. Dahlmann's argument for the German national character of Schleswig depended not on some census of the preferred language of all existing

households but on the identification of genuine nationhood with the culture and language of the more educated strata.¹⁴⁹ Dahlmann believed that political rule should be coterminous with linguistic areas, in turn determined by the culturally dominant idiom. More generally, Grimm and Dahlmann held that the historical geography of languages should serve as the indispensable reference point for politics. The philologist and the historian both presented themselves as authoritative experts who could validly define nationhood, discriminate among peoples, evaluate their relative cultural predominance, and settle conflicting territorial claims.

Even so, Grimm and others balked when the convener of the conference, Dahlmann's son-in-law the jurist August Ludwig Reyscher (1802–1880), called upon the collective of Germanists to decide, in the manner of a “jury,” that the duchies should cease to belong to the Danish crown.¹⁵⁰ The opponents to this suggestion pointed out that an assembly of scholars did not have the authority to pronounce a binding verdict on a legal and political question, and that the very attempt would vitiate the scholarly character of the event.¹⁵¹ As chairman, Grimm himself adamantly resisted Reyscher's suggestion. The topic of Schleswig and Holstein was clearly political to the scholars themselves, and philological knowledge was obviously politically relevant knowledge, but an academic association, Grimm wrote in a newspaper summary after the congress, could not suddenly transform itself into a juridical body; it possessed no competence or right to make an outright political decision.¹⁵²

For Grimm, however, this attitude of restraint was a question of context, venue, and authorization, and certainly not of opinion. Responding indignantly to a pro-Danish article in a Berlin newspaper in the spring of 1848, Grimm once again called Schleswig a German country, into which the Danes had “forced themselves.”¹⁵³ Grimm also did not hesitate to vote for resolutions and encourage belligerence once he acted as an elected deputy in the national parliament in Frankfurt during 1848, the year of European upheaval. When the new Danish king, under pressure from mass protests in 1848, declared Schleswig a Danish territory and wanted to make its male inhabitants available for service in the Danish army, the Prussian army moved into Denmark.¹⁵⁴ By the end of April 1848, the Danes had been defeated on land, while the Danish blockade of the northern Prussian coastline continued.¹⁵⁵ The parliament in Frankfurt opened in May, with representatives from Schleswig and Holstein – a *de facto* recognition of their German status.¹⁵⁶ During the debates, Jacob Grimm, the expert philologist now turned parliamentarian, supported the campaign against Denmark and even advocated for a particularly aggressive position, namely continued warfare, to be concluded only when the Danish

crown acknowledged all German claims. He added that the national parliament ought to declare that it would never tolerate the “intervention [*einmischung*]” of a foreign people in German national affairs.¹⁵⁷ Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann was also a leading parliamentarian and both Grimm and Dahlmann gave nationalist speeches;¹⁵⁸ the continuity with the first congress of the Germanists two years earlier was unmistakable.

Even so, the war over Schleswig disappointed the nationalists, among them Jacob Grimm. Leaned upon by Britain and Russia and suffering from the blockade by the superior Danish fleet, Prussia signed an armistice in Malmö, Sweden, in August 1848,¹⁵⁹ without the approval of the deputies in the German national parliament.¹⁶⁰ The majority of the parliamentarians recognized that they had no control over any military forces and had to accept the Prussian course of action; this meant endorsing the armistice.¹⁶¹ To Grimm, this conclusion was deeply disappointing. Prussia, he wrote to his brother Wilhelm in Berlin, had simply committed an “an un-German action [*einer undeutschen handlung*].”¹⁶² As always, the philologist believed himself competent to decide when regimes were acting in an appropriately German way. The Prussian action was un-German because it did not further the consolidation of Germany, and it constituted a betrayal of the German nationals in Schleswig. The so-called Elbe duchies would later be annexed by German forces, but only in the year 1864, and then by a Prussia led by Otto von Bismarck, who would become the first chancellor of a unified imperial Germany.¹⁶³ By the time of the second war in Schleswig, however, Jacob Grimm had already passed away; he died in September 1863.

Power and Knowledge in the Age of Nationalism

Jacob Grimm believed that philological knowledge qualified him for a crucial modern political task. In his view, the philologist could best distinguish between peoples and trace their supposedly natural borders to identify viable and legitimate territorial units of rule. The first Germanist convention, chaired by Jacob Grimm and dominated by professors with nationalist sympathies, was one public arena for the philologist aspiration to inform and guide political life,¹⁶⁴ and the interlinked discussions about the German territorial shape and constitutional form, national belonging and citizenship, continued in the Frankfurt parliament two years later.¹⁶⁵ Germany’s geographical definition and basic political institutions were major topics of debate then, too,¹⁶⁶ and almost a tenth of the parliamentarians were professors; the two deputies Jacob Grimm and Friedrich

Christoph Dahlmann were joined by several of their Germanist peers.¹⁶⁷ As shown in the letter to the Prussian monarch Frederick William IV, however, Jacob Grimm also wanted to reach the ultimate political elite of his day and even hoped for the appearance of a philologically informed ruler, a philologist king.

Grimm's political philologist differs from other, more familiar representatives of knowledge, theory, and scholarship who have sought to make interventions in the political realm. He did not, for instance, set out to aid princes engaged in struggles over power with political know-how in the Machiavellian tradition. For this well-known type of advisor, history had served as a repository of valid examples of moral, prudential, or heroic behavior, a large pool of case studies for strategy geared toward the conquest and maintenance of state power.¹⁶⁸ In contrast, the nineteenth-century philologist of Jacob Grimm's kind treated history as the medium for the unfolding of national cultures that ought to achieve institutional expression at the level of the political order.¹⁶⁹ For Grimm, history did not serve as a collection of templates for advisable action but represented instead a process of evolution to which fundamental political arrangements must be adapted¹⁷⁰ – the nation was the ultimate anchoring reality for the state. The philologist did not provide counsel on the basis of an archive of human behavior¹⁷¹ but instead wanted to delimit the unit of rule on the basis of researched insights into the collective's historicity and cultural individuality.

The political philologist also contrasts sharply with the *philosophes* who had gathered around the enlightened despots of the late eighteenth century. Absolutist rulers had famously invited secular and cosmopolitan thinkers to serve as tutors, correspondents, and advisors,¹⁷² partly to create a stimulating court culture but also to draw on their assistance in the project of augmenting absolutist power through rational reform.¹⁷³ Exponents of the Enlightenment who wished to enhance the population's moral, physical, and economic well-being by means of pedagogy, planning, and continuous policing willingly entered into alliances with major European rulers intent on enlarging the state's authority and capacity.¹⁷⁴ In the 1760s, for example, a whole cohort of philosophers imagined themselves as the consultants of Catherine the Great of Russia.¹⁷⁵ From the perspective of the philologist with knowledge about the origin and evolution of individuated cultures over time, such a combination of philosophy and absolutist rule would be a recipe for a potentially arrogant treatment of national peoples. Viable rule, the philologist believed, depended not on the superior reason of a king in conversation with

philosophers but on the linguistic and cultural *fit* of government and governed within the frame of national self-determination. The absolutely primary task of a German king was not to act prudently and not to love wisdom, but to act in a “German” rather than an “un-German” way, out of genuine attachment to the German nation. The king should not rely on the philosopher but the philologist.

Grimm’s political philologist differed, finally, from the “intellectual,” a term reserved here for authors who operated in the liberal public sphere and at least partly drew their income from the growing literary and journalistic market.¹⁷⁶ Intellectuals of the early nineteenth century met the demand of the reading public for poetry, anecdotes, satires, political reporting, entertainment, and opinion and hence stood apart from the apparatus of the state, which they confronted in the form of censorship. In Grimm’s time, the intellectual was epitomized by the popular poet and correspondent Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), who wrote in German but spent long stretches of his life in Paris and had a Jewish background.¹⁷⁷ The intellectual’s relatively independent position, and in Heine’s case exilic location,¹⁷⁸ allowed for an unsparingly critical perspective on German political affairs, but such an autonomous standing and even extraterritorial vantage point could also provoke complaints about political incompetence, dilettantism, and aloofness.¹⁷⁹

The difference between the philologist and the intellectual in the censored but nonetheless growing public sphere of the early nineteenth century should be apparent. The philological researcher embodied by Grimm typically occupied a post at a government-funded university and addressed political issues on the basis of specialist knowledge; his resource was expertise in a recognized discipline validated by a community of scholars. He possessed epistemic authority rather than moral charisma or artistic ability. The critical intellectual in Grimm’s era was, by contrast, not infrequently an aspiring academic discriminated in or ejected from the university system¹⁸⁰ who succeeded in the public sphere thanks to a facility with genres of public speech and engaged the audience through appeals to their conscience and political interest. The intellectual was not an academically trained expert speaking to fellow experts as Grimm did in 1846, but rather a figure of the public speaking to the public. The ultimate aim of someone like Heine was also not to assume a position as a government expert or counselor close to the ruler, but to mobilize public opinion against concentrated power, a project that was quite foreign to Grimm. Yet Heine, our exemplary intellectual here, did at one point turn to the Prussian king, to Frederick William IV. In his long satirical poem

Germany: A Winter's Tale from 1844, he advised the king not to persecute poets but to "spare" them.¹⁸¹ The advice was mingled with a threat: Heine added ironically that mercy toward poets was a tactically prudent move for the king who would otherwise become the object of their enduring ridicule.¹⁸² In December 1844, the Prussian monarch issued an arrest warrant for the poet.

Grimm believed he possessed politically relevant knowledge, but he had little interest in offering strategic advice, formulating rational policy, or speaking truth to power. Instead, he and his colleagues among the Germanists focused on the historical emergence, geographical extension, and legal and political traditions of a distinct people – the German people – and claimed that their knowledge enabled them to uncover a reliable national basis for a future political order. The program was very much of its time. The political philologist was a transitional figure who appeared in an era of political reconfiguration, after the French Revolution, the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, the Napoleonic restructuring of German states, and the post-Napoleonic restoration, all dramatic developments that had challenged the legitimacy of old dynastic regimes and generated new and short-lived political units. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, lands changed hands and borders were adjusted multiple times, which eroded the sense of a legitimate and geographically settled system of rule.¹⁸³ It was in this situation that a philologist such as Jacob Grimm stepped in to supply a new and supposedly stable ground for future politics. Borders were to be determined not by unpredictable transactions and temporary alliances among kings or by military conquests and imperial hegemony, but by the historical homelands of national peoples. This new principle of boundary drawing led to further turbulence and war, such as in the case of Schleswig-Holstein, but the ultimate aim was the establishment of a non-arbitrary political map composed of sovereign nations.

In Grimm's view, disciplined examinations of the nation's historical space could plausibly ground national politics precisely because they were not shaped by the interests, or the whims, of absolutist rulers. Philologists such as Grimm and Dahlmann claimed to be able to provide fundamental orientation in the political realm not despite of but rather thanks to their strict adherence to methodological principles of research, institutionally sheltered at the university that recruited and promoted its members according to meritocratic criteria of aptitude and achievement.¹⁸⁴ A modern reader of Grimm and his peers is likely to spot biased research, conducted by nationalist professors interested in furthering their ideological agenda, but the

scholars themselves saw no necessary tension between their commitment to research, on the one hand, and their dedication to national life, on the other. On the first day of the congress, the organizer August Ludwig Reyscher declared that the scholars were meeting to further “science [*Wissenschaft*]” and to honor the “fatherland”; he seems to have perceived no conflict whatsoever between these two objectives.¹⁸⁵ The deliberations instead reveal that the methods of scholarship, such as comparative grammar and a rigorous approach to written sources, were understood to guarantee objective findings about language, law, and history. The nation emerged most clearly and conspicuously in the medium of methodical, meticulous scholarship.¹⁸⁶ The philologist could help establish an authentically national and hence legitimate politics because the information about the German nation had been gathered and organized within an autonomous system of knowledge production.

Modern disciplinary knowledge could and should be put in the service of modern political legitimacy by negotiating a new, more fitting relationship between rulers and ruled – this was the underlying assumption of the politically vocal philologists. The 1846 letter to the Prussian king written by Grimm and signed by his colleagues encapsulated the attempt of the professional researcher to give “counsel [*ratschlüsse*]” to a head of state, however timidly and cautiously.¹⁸⁷ The philologist, Jacob Grimm believed, possessed knowledge of pivotal importance to the exercise of rule, but it was not knowledge of the practicalities of effective governance, the history of diplomacy and military strategy, and certainly not philosophical insight into principles of justice and virtue; it was methodologically sound knowledge of the historical integrity and distinguishing traits of the people as nation. As we shall see in the next chapter, this was a belief shaped by experiences early in Grimm’s career, experiences that supplied the motivation for the first and most famous of Jacob and Wilhem Grimms’ projects, the collection of children- and household tales.