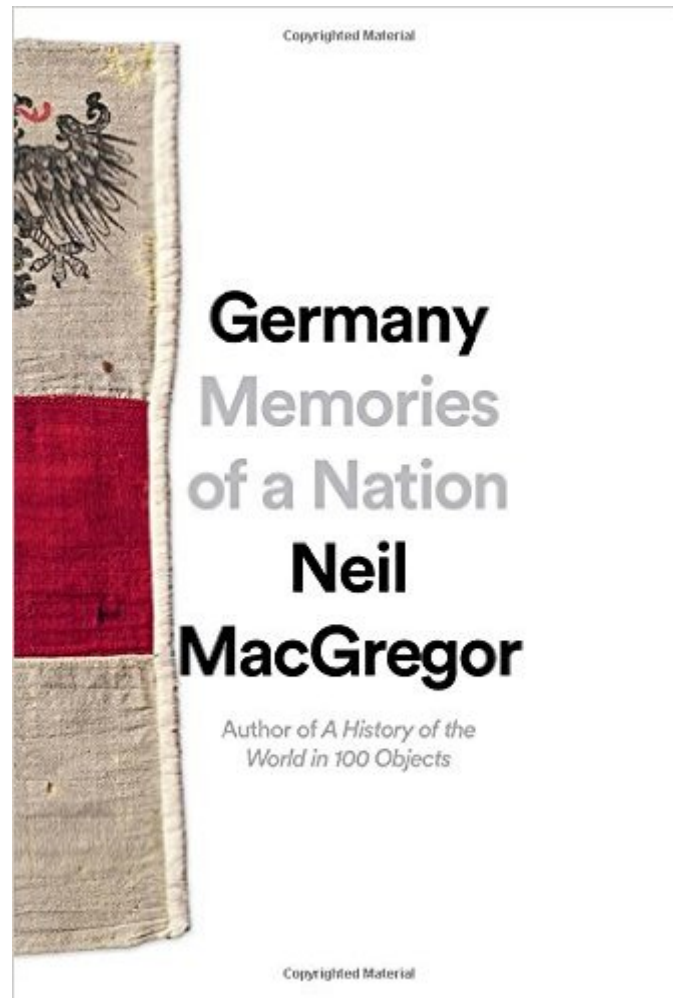


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Germany: Memories Of A Nation



Synopsis

For the past 140 years, Germany has been the central power in continental Europe. Twenty-five years ago a new German state came into being. How much do we really understand this new Germany, and how do its people understand themselves? Neil MacGregor argues that, uniquely for any European country, no coherent, overarching narrative of Germany's history can be constructed, for in Germany both geography and history have always been unstable. Its frontiers have constantly shifted. Königsberg, home to the greatest German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, is now Kaliningrad, Russia; Strasbourg, in whose cathedral Wolfgang von Goethe, Germany's greatest writer, discovered the distinctiveness of his country's art and history, now lies within the borders of France. For most of the five hundred years covered by this book Germany has been composed of many separate political units, each with a distinct history. And any comfortable national story Germans might have told themselves before 1914 was destroyed by the events of the following thirty years. German history may be inherently fragmented, but it contains a large number of widely shared memories, awarenesses, and experiences; examining some of these is the purpose of this book. MacGregor chooses objects and ideas, people and places that still resonate in the new Germany—porcelain from Dresden and rubble from its ruins, Bauhaus design and the German sausage, the crown of Charlemagne and the gates of Buchenwald—to show us something of its collective imagination. There has never been a book about Germany quite like it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This richly illustrated volume offers thought-provoking essays into a wide range of key periods and

personalities that contributed to the development of modern Germany. Though the text exceeds 600 pages, I found the book hard to put down. In some respects, if formatted differently, it might be seen as a "coffee table" book, but the wedding of illustrations and text is very successful in presenting a reasonably complete account of modern German history. Unlike many other histories of Germany, MacGregor's book does not devote disproportionate attention to the Third Reich and its antecedents. Though quite informative, it is never dull and does not get mired in extraneous details. Although at times rather discursive, the 30 essays are arranged thematically and hence are well integrated. (The sections are: "Where Is Germany?", "Imagining Germany," "The Persistent Past," "Made in Germany," "The Descent," and "Living with History.") Readers with a range of knowledge of modern Germany history should find the book appealing and understandable. Even experts should find some fresh insights here. MacGregor's treatment is broad ranging in scope, including political, cultural, geographic, and economic developments. The book itself is a joy to read, printed on heavy stock paper and including carefully chosen illustrations, most of them in striking color. Seven maps representing German geography at key junctures are also included. The book exemplifies Knopf publishing at its finest.

This is an excellent book written by the former director of the British Museum who curated a recent exhibition of the same name. There are no footnotes and the references are not very clearly attributed, but these very omissions make this easy and pleasant to read. For a general audience this is a great introduction to the making of the modern united nation. Questions about Prussia, the Hanseatic League, and the Holy Roman Empire are answered here in a beautifully illustrated format. Neil MacGregor has written a fine account of Germany then and now. The book is printed in Germany and these qualities are a tribute to their superior printing technology. (See my disparaging comments about the poor production of photographer Sally Mann's recent book "Hold Still" and you will understand why I appreciate the quality of this book). This is a book to enjoy now and to refer to often in years to come.

To say that I loved this book would be an understatement. As a student of German and Austrian history, I have read many of the books that the author used for this book but the author synthesizes that information in such a way that he makes it seem even more interesting than it is. Perhaps that is because of the visuals included in the book. Excellent photographic reproductions of art and architecture and books are produced here that allow one to visualize German history. The author's beautiful prose adds to the appeal of the book as well. In short, this is a superb book to read if one

wants to understand the paths of German history. MacGregor uses art and architecture to narrate the history of Germany. The photos in this book are truly sublime. In thematic sections divided into chapters, the author takes the reader on a journey into the many Germanies' past. Yes, more than one Germany because until 1871, there was no one German nation. We now think of Prussia as Germany but that is not the only Germany. This was also the area of Saxony and the Hanseatic League and of the Holy Roman Empire and a host of micro German states. The book is mostly written in chronological order though there are jumps from the present to the past and back to the present again. Beginning with a geographical placement of Germany, the author then moves on to the idea of Germany, its history, its arts and sciences, its Fall, and ends with its present. This is one of the best histories of Germany you will ever read. I cannot recommend it more. It's a book that you will finish and wish to reread it again because that's how good it is.

I enjoyed this book tremendously. Using cultural artifacts, the author wove the complex history of Germany into a fascinating narrative. I liked the fact that the book is broken into short chapters, which makes this big book easy to read even if you don't have long stretches of reading time. The language flows well. The illustrations have high resolution and beautiful colors. All in all a high quality book.

Magnificent. Beautifully written, elegantly presented, thoughtfully prepared, appropriately illustrated. People familiar with the material can quibble about MacGregor's choices (I think he missed a major opportunity by not talking about Peter Link, the sculptor of "Imperia," in conjunction Walhalla) but no one can fault him for his wit and his chapter on the "lost" capitols of Prague and Koenigsberg is particularly insightful. I bought a copy for myself and several others for friends. I do have one complaint. I don't know why the editors decided not to capitalize "Bible," preferring throughout to use the lower case "bible," as in the case of "Luther's bible." Holy books of religions are traditionally capitalized: "Qur'an," "Bhagavad Gita," "Book of Mormon," "Tripitaka," etc. Not to do so with "Bible" can possibly give the unfortunate impression of an unintended slight.

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