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# Race and the printed language: roman and gothic letterforms in the making of the “Aryan race”

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## Abstract

This article examines the use of roman and gothic letterforms in Nazi propaganda to express racial-national distinctions between “Aryans” and “non-Aryans”, and Jews in particular. The link between race and language was central in the theory of the “Aryan” race, whose supposed primary characteristic was the possession of the body of the ancient Greek athlete. The article examines the birth and evolution of the roman and gothic typefaces, following Gutenberg’s printing press in the fifteenth century, and assesses how Nazi publications harked back to German and European typographic traditions to make the printed word a vehicle of German “Aryan” identity and divide readers. Theoretically, the article builds on Benedict Anderson’s concept of “print-language” by making a distinction between “print-language” and “printed language”. It draws attention to the materiality and form of the printed language, as bearers of meaning with their own power to divide or unite communities and create nations.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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Nation; race; language; Nazi; script; antisemitism

## Introduction

This article examines the symbolic use of roman and gothic letterforms in Nazi propaganda to express and promote racial-national distinctions between Aryans and non-Aryans, and Jews, in particular.

It does this by connecting writing scripts, handwritten and printed, to language and to beliefs about language. The link between race and language was one of the central claims of the theory of the Aryan race, which emerged in the nineteenth century, and whose primary characteristic was believed to be the possession of the body of the young athletes of ancient Greece. This theory was not only part of Nazi ideology about the German language and the racial type of the German nation, but also of other national-cum-racial movements across Europe (e.g. in England, France, Sweden). The instilling of ethnic prejudice into scientific speculations about biological race became intertwined with modern ideological nationalism, both of which developed from the eighteenth century onwards, manifesting themselves in all spheres of modern life and, most remarkably and intriguingly, in the graphic presentation of the written language.

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The visual form of the written language was a matter that involved the government directly during the first half of the twentieth century in Germany. Of particular national interest was the *printed language*, i.e. the written language reproduced by printing processes. Gothic letterforms were referred to, in Germany, as the “German script” (*deutsche Schrift*), while “Latin script” meant roman letterforms only. Both gothic and roman scripts had their own varieties of typeface, like *Fraktur* and *Antiqua*, respectively. A writing script is a collection of graphic signs, such as letters, syllables or words that are used for the materialisation of the written language (Březina 2021); in this sense, gothic and roman are *variations* of the Latin script. But from the perspective of users, gothic was a script on its own, like Cyrillic and Greek, and roman was another. In our case, as we shall show, gothic tended to be perceived in Germany as the German script for German words.

The article claims that the Nazi party used, in its most important publications, different letterforms to express racial-national and gender distinctions. The interpretability of these symbolic meanings of letterforms derived from: (i) established traditions of typeface use and its national significance; (ii) widely propagated re-interpretation and application of these traditions in the context of new biological ideas that linked physical appearance (race) with language and its scripts; and (iii) government-instituted policies determining script use. An analysis of the letterforms of publications produced by the Nazi movement shows how the gothic and roman letterforms were used to express racial distinction, and the belief that race and language are biologically intertwined, the one implying the other. It further shows that gender-related distinctions, within the German Aryan nation, were created through letterforms. Unlike national distinctions, gender distinctions made by use of distinct letterforms were implicit rather than explicitly formulated as public policy. The history of typefaces shows their use and power as deliberate symbols not only of national, and racial communities, but also of universal humanity.

The article is divided into three parts: the first part situates the printed language in the context of theories about graphic language and Benedict Anderson’s hugely influential connection of the printed language with the birth of nationalism; the second part shows the importance of letterforms as a distinct and meaning-bearing aspect of the printed language. To this end, it explores the different meanings that were attached to the gothic and roman typefaces from Gutenberg’s printing press in the fifteenth century, to the broad adoption across Europe of the roman typeface in the sixteenth century, with the notable exception of Germany, which retained typefaces in gothic form. The third part analyses how Nazi publications re-imagined these letterforms, manipulating their origins and historical associations. It shows how German and European traditions of gothic and roman letterforms were transformed into attributes and expressions of the modern German nation, now re-imagined as a physically-biologically distinct and superior race.

The article examines the evolution of the roman and gothic typefaces and assesses how Nazi printed publications harked back to the German roots of printing and German typographic traditions, in order to make even the printed word a vehicle of German Aryan identity. It sets Nazi publications in the context of the *longue durée* of the evolution of printing in Germany, since Luther’s translation of the New Testament into German, published in 1522. It contributes to the understanding of Nazi reliance on the past as a source of its own legitimacy, and Nazi uses and abuses of the past through revival and re-interpretation of German tradition. It shows the great emphasis that the Nazi movement placed on the printed word, in addressing an intensely

intellectual and literate society. From the more theoretical point of view, the article contributes to the debate over the role of the printed language in nation formation.

## Part I

### *Turning to the printed language*

The graphic and typographic embodiment of verbal language is often assumed to be transparent so as not to disturb the reader. However, this assumption has been shaken by linguists who have undertaken what Britta Schneider and Theresa Heyd (2024, 6) call, a “turn to materiality”. The turn is meant to uncover overlooked aspects of language – including race, class, and gender-related dimensions of power, as they “are written into any and all kinds of meaning-making and therefore are part of embodied, material, and distributed language practices” (Schneider and Heyd 2024, 8). Much of this turn came from the language ideology tradition within linguistic anthropology: as Judith T. Irvine (2019, 68) puts it, the assumption that language belongs to a mentalistic sphere apart from physical things “is itself an ideology of language”.

The turn involves focusing on the materiality that is integral to language and not only that of its surrounding contexts, which linguistic anthropologists have been examining for a long time (Pennycook 2024, 120; Shankar and Cavanaugh 2017, 1). A writing system, Jennifer Dickinson (2017) argues, does more than render linguistic structures tangible: it forms community membership through the process of producing written artefacts and the practice of reading. Since not everyone is able to decode a writing system, writing functions as a boundary distinguishing members and non-members of a community (Dickinson 2017, 267). As Jürgen Spitzmüller (2012, 279) further shows, neo-nationalist groups and rap musicians use gothic letterforms to express their respective ideologies.

While the turn to materiality tends to address contemporary times (Schneider and Heyd 2024; Shankar and Cavanaugh 2017, 17) and comes from anthropology-related perspectives, historians have also reflected on the threshold between the material production of language and language itself. Steinberg (1955, 123) argues that national languages were an unintended consequence of the printing press, and Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin (Febvre and Martin [1958] 2010, 319) link this historical process to the development of book production and distribution. Benedict Anderson’s ([1983] 2006) *Imagined Communities* encapsulates this link with the concepts of “print-language” and “print-capitalism”. As Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2016, 630) notes, Febvre and Martin’s ([1958] 2010) *The Coming of the Book* was one of Anderson’s main sources about the history of the printing press.

Print-language means the written language produced by the printing press, which cut across spoken differences and was the source of national languages. For Anderson, “Print-language is what invents nationalism” (Anderson [1983] 2006, 134). Through language, the nation is imagined as a fraternity of equals (Anderson [1983] 2006, 84, 254). Furthermore, “[l]anguage is not an instrument of exclusion: in principle, anyone can learn any language. On the contrary, it is fundamentally inclusive” (134).

Anderson’s contribution to the understanding of the dynamics of the printed language has been significant and influential. However, it needs to be qualified for a finer understanding. According to language ideology researchers, “print-language” causes language standardisation, a process that, they contend, neither comes from nor conjures a fraternity of

equals (Irvine and Gal 2000; Kroskrity 2000). Social hierarchy and power structures are integral to standardisation and behind a semblance of language-related homogeneity there is actual heterogeneity and variation. In short, the perceived inclusivity and equality is what Pierre Bourdieu ([1982] 1991) calls the *misrecognition* of the symbolic power wielded via language. The article explores this dimension of the printed language.

### **The graphic presentation of national languages**

Building on the connection between nation and the printing of languages, put forward by *Imagined Communities*, we examine in this article the tangible case of the printing of the German language in Germany, and its regulation by the German state both before and during the Nazi regime. We focus on the use of gothic and roman letterforms by the Nazi movement, examining the interplay between letterforms and the categories “national” and non-national or “foreign”, a term used at that time, including in language contexts, as in *Fremdwörter* (foreign words).

We consider, (a) how letterforms became objects of legislation; (b) how letterform-related legislation was introduced and put into practice; and (c) whether the nation was a category that determined the different ways in which the printed language was used.

In our analysis, we combined Michael Twyman’s (1985) theory of graphic language and the model of “context of situation” from Systemic Functional Linguistics. Our main types of primary sources were German government documents that defined gothic-related policies, and key examples of Nazi-produced books, magazines, posters and badges. To explore social differentiations, we compared printed material aimed at different audiences – women, men and children. We analysed this material in relation to Nazi notions of race, language, and the nation.

Twyman (1985) rejects the categorisation of language into spoken and written, seeing graphic language as language, *tout court*. His categories of graphic language are verbal, pictorial and schematic, and what we call *printed language* is one of his sub-categories of verbal language – “machine-made/printing” (Twyman 1985, 246). Our analysis concentrated on the combination of material means, imagery and letterform, as the meaning of graphic language comes from the dynamic combination of these elements (Spitzmüller 2012, 257–258).

We contextualised graphic language, adapting the model of “context of situation” from Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday [1978] 1987, 62–64), which foregrounds who is addressing and who is being addressed in the communication (“tenor”); the purpose, activity and topic motivating the use of language (“field”); and the tone, genre and medium (“mode”). More generally, our interpretation of Nazi graphic language was based on Spitzmüller’s (2012, 255) concept of “graphic ideology”, namely, the “sets of beliefs attributed to and expressed by means of graphic phenomena”. The next session sketches a history of the beliefs and ideologies around gothic and roman letterforms.

## **Part II**

### **The rise of the transnational “humanist script”: the symbolic association of the roman typeface with Greek and roman antiquity and renaissance humanism**

Historians have traced the emergence, evolution, and use of the two different letterforms, the gothic and roman, in different languages across Europe, over time. The gradual

dominance of roman typefaces in European printing, and the continuous use of gothic for German, is a common thread in Stanley Morison ([1926] 1962) and Daniel Berkley Updike's ([1922] 1980) history of typography, Steinberg's (1955) history of printing, and Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin's (Febvre and Martin [1958] 2010) history of the book. However, as gothic became standard typeface in Germany, printers and publishers also used roman, mainly, although not exclusively, for texts in German aimed at an international readership (Luidl 2003; Steinberg 1955). This convention continued into the twentieth century, acquiring particular salience and a new significance during the Nazi regime. From the outset, the letterforms which became the basis for the mechanised roman typeface were meant to convey symbolic meaning. Referred to as the "humanist script", and, initially, not a mechanically reproduced script, the humanist script created a vibrant market in elite, aristocratic circles across Europe in the second half of the fifteenth century (Febvre and Martin [1958] 2010, 81). In the heat of the revival of classical learning, princes, bishops, and bankers began collecting manuscript copies of the classics in the humanist script and requested that contemporary scribes replicate it.

Elaborated over the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the humanist script was based on the Carolingian minuscule of the ninth century and Italian manuscripts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Davies 1996), accompanied by capital letters modelled on ancient Roman inscriptions (Figure 1). Seeking to impart to the text a style believed to evoke Gareco-Roman antiquity, Italian humanists developed this new script that further marked their quest for accuracy in the reading and copying of classical texts. They developed this script also in reaction against a script that was considered illegible, symbol of a "barbaric" and "primitive" world (Ricci 2019), and referred to as "gothic" with distaste.

The letterforms created by humanist scholar and calligrapher Poggio Bracciolini in the beginning of the fifteenth century is an example of the humanist script. Over the



**Figure 1.** Pantheon's inscription in the kind of letterform that modelled the capital letters of roman type. Built in c. 27 BCE, rebuilt between 118 and 128 CE. Photo: Gabriella Clare Marino / Unsplash.

following decades, wealthy collectors who were not necessarily humanists invested in manuscripts written in a similar style. Meanwhile, Gutenberg was perfecting his technique to cast movable type in metal, using a gothic letterform with which he printed the Bible in 1455. Around 1465, a humanist script (rather than gothic) was first used as the model for a new typeface, a practice that became increasingly popular. What became known as the “roman typeface” and, more generally, “roman script”, is the kind of letter originally produced in metal for printing, modelled after the humanist script.

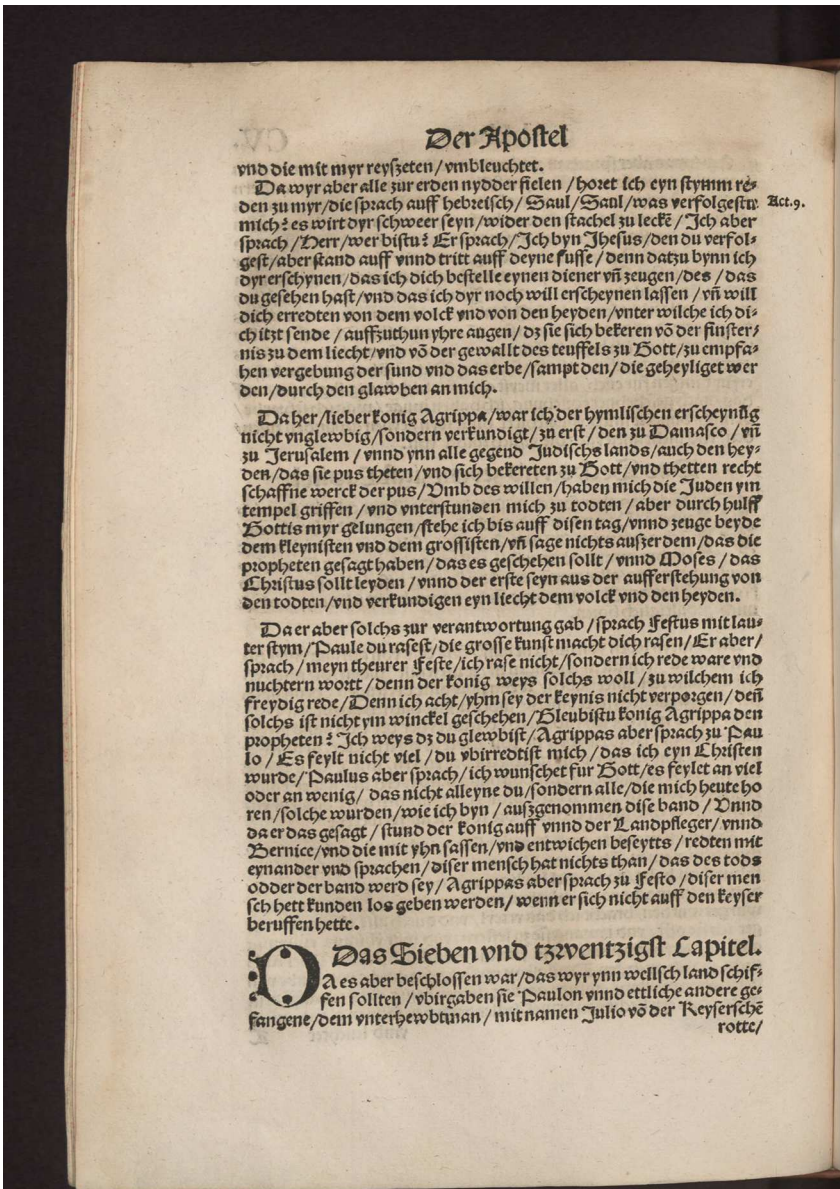
The roman type emerged in Italy, where printers who established printing workshops in the late fifteenth century found many book lovers who “wanted to possess text in the alphabet inspired by antiquity” (Febvre and Martin [1958] 2010, 81). Among these enthusiasts were patrons and entrepreneurs who financed the establishment of printing workshops. Symbol of Italian humanism, the humanist script converted into the metal roman type became a sign of one’s appreciation of the classics and the *belles lettres* – indeed, a sign *and* symbol of sophistication and good taste. As people’s identification with specific ideas, sentiments, and groups associated with the world of classical learning expanded, the material expression of this learning, in a distinctive typeface, contributed to its expansion. It would further demarcate differences between genres of texts and groups of audiences.

Gothic, in contrast, was typically used for Christian-related texts. As Febvre and Martin observe, around 1450, different genres of text had their respective genres of calligraphy (Febvre and Martin [1958] 2010, 78–79). Gutenberg set the Bible in a style of gothic known as “Textura”, following the convention of script for ecclesiastical works at his time (Figure 2). The practice of presenting the Bible in gothic that existed for manuscript copies continued in mechanically printed texts and lasted for a while, concurrently with roman type.

Luther followed this convention in his translation of the New Testament into German, first published in September 1522 (Figure 3). Melchior Lotter, printer of Luther’s New Testament, used a distinctive rounder style of gothic called “Schwabacher”, in which Luther’s translation of the whole Bible, published in 1534, was also set. Gothic had also been used by the printer Anton Koberger when he published the Bible in German in the late



**Figure 2.** “Textura” style of gothic in Latin in the Gutenberg Bible, printed in Mainz (detail). 1455. Source: Library of Congress.

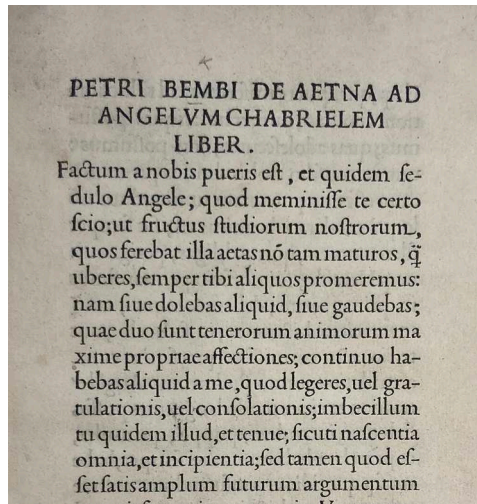


**Figure 3.** Schwabacher in the 1522 edition of the New Testament translated by Martin Luther. Source: Wikimedia Commons / Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart.

fifteenth century. From a typographic point of view, Schwabacher kept Luther's translations closer to a Bible in Latin printed in gothic than humanist books in Latin, printed in roman (Figure 4).

Swabacher sent the message that the text maintained the tradition of presenting the Bible in gothic type, while, at the same time, and contrary to the norm, the language was German, not Latin. The various dialects of German spoken at the time formed two broader branches, High German and Low German. Luther was able to communicate with readers of both. 87 editions of his Old Testament published from 1522 to 1546 were in High





**Figure 4.** *De Aetna* by Pietro Bembo, published by Aldus Manutius and printed in roman type by the Aldine Press in Venice (detail). 1495–96. Source: British Library.

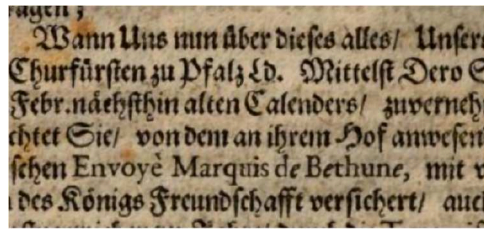
German and 19 in Low German (Engelsing 1973, 29), a sign of Luther’s broad reach but also of the greater weight of High German. While dialects of German had different standing – eventually Lutheran Churches would reject Low German (Polenz 2000, 93) – they all challenged, at the time, Latin as the language authorised by the Catholic Church for the Bible. Consequently, in Luther’s 1522 New Testament and 1534 complete Bible, printed in Schwabacher, we can see the synthesis and affirmation of both the vernacular-national (or so-called “profane”) *and* the sacred.

### ***The battle of the typefaces: religious and national dimensions of the roman and gothic typefaces***

From the mid-sixteenth century, a typographic schism unfolded: roman was gradually consolidated as the typographic form of most European vernacular (or national) languages, whereas German continued to be typeset in gothic.

In the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church itself turned to roman type. It commissioned the Aldine Press, renowned since the fifteenth century for its humanist books in roman type, to print the Bible in Latin in roman in 1592. Although the process was not linear, it was unstoppable: roman letterforms eventually became the standard in the majority of European languages irrespective of the genre of text.

German was a notable exception. Publishers of texts in German did not follow the general trend, maintaining gothic in most genres of literature except scientific books and books in German for the foreign market. Steinberg (1955, 29) and Febvre and Martin ([1958] 2010, 192) suggest that the persistence of gothic was influenced by both the massive production and dissemination of Luther’s Bibles, which would foster familiarity with those letterforms among readers, and the desire to differentiate German texts and German culture (with its Reformed, Lutheran orientations), from non-German texts and cultures.



**Figure 5.** Words “Envoyè Marquis de Bethune” in roman type, in *Decretum, welches aus specialn Befelch Ihro Käys. Maytt. durch dero Principal- Commissarium ...* 1674. Source: Google Books.

Steinberg (1955, 29) notes that as gothic became a German-specific style, roman was used for *Fremdwörter* – i.e. “foreign words” – in texts otherwise printed in gothic (Figure 5). The shape of letters was converted into a dividing line between “German” and “foreign”, something analogous to what Léon Poliakov (1974, 91) called a “phobia of *Fremdwörter*” that dates back to the seventeenth century, when linguistic purists successfully campaigned against the use of foreign expressions in German. Tacitus was wielded as evidence and argument at a time when the German language was praised for not having foreign contamination (Poliakov 1974, 89–91). By resorting to Tacitus, these campaigners brought to the realm of language Tacitus’ ([c. 98 CE] 1788, 338–341) opinion that the German people were not mixed with other peoples: “*Ipse eorum opinionibus accedo, qui Germaniae populos nullis aliis aliarum nationum connubiis infectos propriam et sinceram et tantum sui similem gentem extitisse arbitratur*” [“I myself agree with the opinions of those who think that the people of Germany have never been tainted by marriages with other nations, have existed as their own, sincere, like no one but themselves”].

Already in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, national histories written by German writers included the statements that (i) Greek and Latin were more recent than, and subordinate to, Germanic languages; (ii) Germanic peoples have a common origin that can be traced in pagan myths and mythological figures such as Odin and Freya, and also from Adam, Shem, Ham and Japheth – a genealogy that combined Germanic paganism and Jewish-Christian (Biblical) genealogy, proposed by Philipp Clüver in the seventeenth century (Poliakov 1974, 90–91). It is significant that the focus extended to “Germanic” – so beyond the German lands proper – because the object of interest was not only one language but a broader family of languages, a trend that would later intensify in the Aryan language-cum-race myth. None of these ideas gained much traction at the time but they gained influential adherents. In practice, the contrast between gothic and roman became available as a visual tool to manifest ideas about Germanness.

### **Typography as an arena for displaying the Aryan myth**

The Aryan myth that became popular from the mid-nineteenth century onwards blended together notions of language and race. Arthur de Gobineau ([1853–55] 1884) was one of the theorists who claimed the existence of an Aryan race. He provided the inspiration for a militant Aryan ideology, which defined Aryan as the supreme white race with a civilising mission, which conquered all others while maintaining its blood unmixed and preserving what Gobineau had referred to as its “*idiome blanc primitif*” [“primeval white idiom”]

(Gobineau [1853–55] 1884, 368). However, it is important to note that Gobineau had emphasised the mixing of blood in the development of what he called the Aryan civilisation, which he saw embodied, most clearly, in ancient Greece, and had explained its decline as the result of *excessive* mixing of the Aryan blood with non-Aryan blood (Biddiss 1970; Leoussi 1999).

The term “Aryan” was rooted in philological studies, and especially the theory that modern European languages descended from a common Aryan origin that included Sanskrit. This theory or classification of languages into interrelated families of languages proposed a distinction between Aryan (or Indo-European) and Semitic languages. To the Semitic family of languages belonged Hebrew and Arabic, whose origin and evolution was separate from the Aryan family. However, Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), the Oxford-based German comparative philologist and leading proponent of the language-race link, would eventually recognise that the language and the physical traits of a people were unconnected: “There are Aryan and Semitic languages, but it is against all rules of logic to speak [...] of an Aryan race, of Aryan blood, of Aryan skulls, and to attempt ethnological classification on purely linguistic grounds” (Davis and Nicholls 2016; Müller 1881, 211; [1861] 1866). The ideology of Aryanism that was developed, despite Max Müller’s protests, conflated notions of race, language and culture, infusing linguistic matters with claims about physical appearance, kinship and blood.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the concept was already widely spread and, in many quarters, accepted as scientific truth (Leoussi 2020). It had been circulating among specialists and laypersons in bestselling publications such as Houston Stewart Chamberlain’s vitriolic antisemitic books. For Aryanism, “family of speech” often meant “lineage of speakers.” When Hitler (1925) repeated without restraint the word Aryan in *Mein Kampf*, he treated the concept as self-evident, with no introduction needed.

Although the Aryan myth had international appeal, the Germans had a specific visual tool to separate their own language from others, thereby forging a distinctive and, indeed, superior variety of Aryan identity: the shape of gothic letterforms. With gothic, the Nazi movement was able to express, graphically and tangibly, a core “Aryanist” principle, i.e. the notion that the Aryan and the Semitic were separate race-languages with separate, distinctive scripts. Past conventions of typographic demarcation of foreign words were available to emphasise “foreign” as *people*, extending the concept of foreign, indefinitely.

### Part III

#### ***Nazi publications and the racialisation of the printed letter – the fate of gothic and roman scripts under the Nazi party***

In the course of the nineteenth century, German national consciousness intensified in opposition to the internationalism of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. It found expression in the typographic dispute known as the “*Frakturstreit*” engaging German governments in script politics – *Schriftpolitik* – that re-defined Germans in new ways, in the twentieth century. On 4 May 1911, the national significance of the gothic script was thrown into high relief on the occasion of a petition to the Reichstag, “1.to obtain the general acceptance of Old Script (Antiqua, so-called Latin script), especially the handwritten form, in official communications of the Reich authorities” and “2... to

ensure that the first writing lessons in elementary schools generally begin with the easier Old Script" (Deutsches Reich 1911, 6361). At the time, both scripts were in use in education. However, there was a hierarchy of letterforms according to which gothic had higher status, as the German script, over roman. The petition seemed to challenge that hierarchy. The most ardent defenders of the petition were Social Democrats. Supporters of the petition, which was voted upon and rejected (75 per cent against it; see Newton 2003, 191) on 17 October, claimed that roman had "particular hygienic advantages" (Deutsches Reich 1911, 6368), i.e. it was healthier for the eyes, as easier to read; it was also better suited for international communication and commerce. Critics of the petition saw it as an assault on German national identity, describing gothic, to which they referred interchangeably as "Fraktur" and "*deutsche Schrift*" ["German script"], as "the right garment for our language", and "the script that they [the German people] have developed over many centuries, which corresponds to their nature, above all to the script of their great men Martin Luther, Wolfgang Goethe, Otto von Bismarck" (Deutsches Reich 1911, 6374).

When the Nazi party came to power, on 30 January 1933, following Hitler's appointment as Chancellor of Germany, it used gothic to address and represent the purest of the Aryan nations, the Germans. On 7 September 1934 the use of *Antiqua* (i.e. roman) in school primers was forbidden throughout the German Reich (Newton 2003, 186). Already in the 1932 election campaign, a pseudo-Hebrew lettering was used as reference to Jews (Figure 6). In the Nazi-imposed Jewish badge, decreed on 1 September 1941, pseudo-Hebrew (Figure 7) was a form of visual segregation which the Nazis applied to different languages, to mark out Jews in Nazi-occupied territories. Linguistic-national differences were obscured by the pseudo-Hebrew lettering (Figures 8 and 9). In 1937, Goebbels' "Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda" circulated a memo that all the publications of all Jewish bookshops were to be in either Hebrew script or *Antiqua* (Newton 2003, 193–195).

Roman letterforms had different functions in Nazi hands. One of its symbolic meanings was "non-Aryan", as the Nazi party used pre-existing associations of roman with foreign words to represent racial exclusion. That was the case of the book *Erblehre und Rassenkunde in bildlicher Darstellung* by Alfred Vogel (1938), arranged as loose sheets for in-class indoctrination of schoolchildren. The book is almost entirely set in gothic; the few words in roman consistently refer to Jews, to other non-Aryans, and to communists. A map illustrating the 1935 Nuremberg law for the "Protection of Blood and German Honour" is representative of the shift from the convention of using roman for foreign words to the Nazi use of roman to designate foreign people, conceived as belonging to different different races (Figure 10).

Schoolchildren, the epicentre of the 1911 parliamentary discussion, were exposed to textbooks and class material dominated by gothic for the most part of the Nazi regime. Schoolbooks show roman as a secondary, supporting letterform with context-based symbolic meanings. A good example is the racial schoolbook *Vererbung/Rasse/Volk* by Erich Thieme (1936). Set in gothic, it contains some targeted words in roman, to underscore the scientific veracity of the information, evoking the pre-established convention of printing scientific publications in roman for international distribution.

Roman is included in the caption of a map of Europe showing the location of the "six Aryan races" of which the Germanic blood was allegedly made – Nordic, Western, Dinaric,



**Figure 6.** Poster of the 1932 presidential election campaign. Support for Hindenburg is written in pseudo-Hebrew lettering and support for Hitler is written in gothic. Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, Gift of the Katz Family.

Dalo-Nordic, East Baltic, Eastern (Figure 11). The map shows no state borders of European countries, tracing racial ones instead. Accordingly, the text claims that Germany's national borders were artificially drawn, not corresponding to reality (Thieme 1936, 29); the people and their race were of paramount importance whereas state borders were secondary (Thieme 1936, 36). As the map represented Germans as Europe-encompassing Aryans, roman designated "Aryans abroad". Vogel's schoolbook includes a similar map of the six Aryan races in Europe, but with gothic letterforms for all Aryans (Figure 12).



**Figure 7.** Nazi-imposed “Jewish badge” with the word Jew in pseudo-Hebrew lettering in German. Source: Wikimedia Commons.



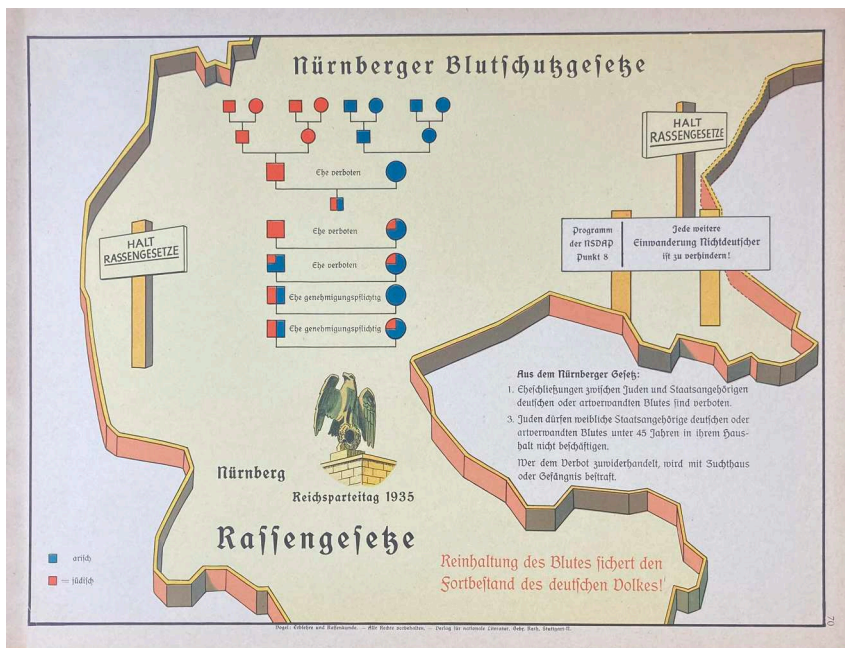
**Figure 8.** Nazi-imposed “Jewish badge” with the word Jew in pseudo-Hebrew lettering in Dutch. Source: Center for Jewish History. Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

Although roman meant “Aryans abroad” in Thieme’s book, and “non-Aryans” in Vogel’s one, both books were consistent in the symbolic demarcation of the inside and the outside of the German-Aryan nation. Children’s interpretation of the meaning of letter-forms was context-dependent and anchored in the pre-established association of gothic with German and roman with foreign.

Defining the term “Aryan”, Thieme (1936, 40) declared that in the past it meant the master races who came from the north and conquered as far as Persia and India, but in contemporary times Aryan signified the six races of the Indo-Germanic “as opposed to Semitic” language group. Thieme’s book further highlights the culture of ancient Rome

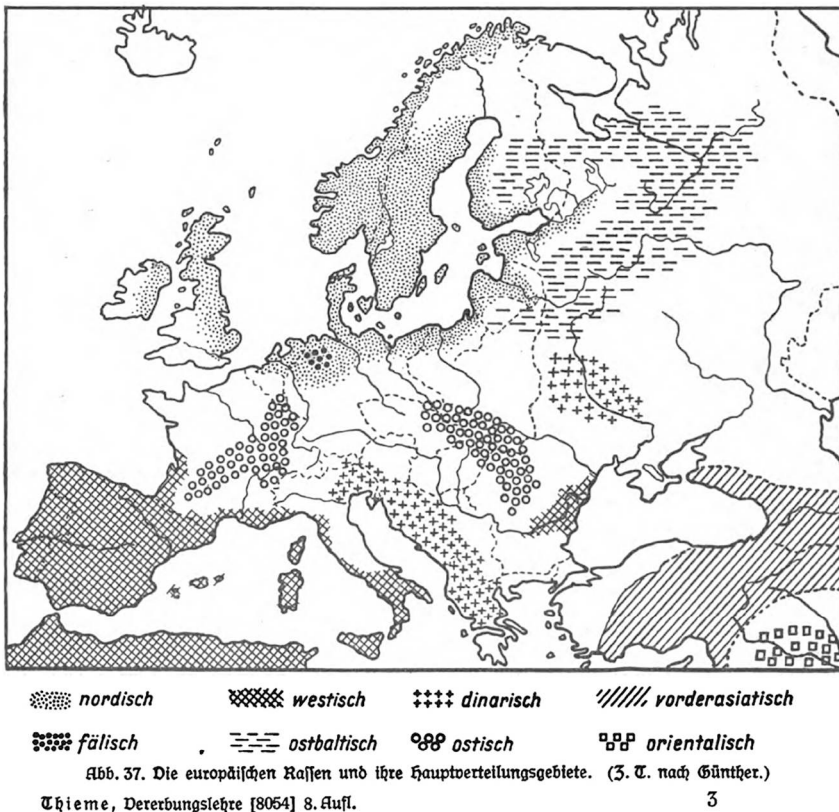


**Figure 9.** Nazi-imposed “Jewish badge” with “Jude” in pseudo-Hebrew lettering in French. Source: Center for Jewish History. Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.



**Figure 10.** Poster illustrating one of the Nuremberg Laws. Gothic is used within the national borders (after the annexation of Austria) and towards the reader, while signs in roman address the bordering countries. Poster number 70 in the schoolbook series *Erblehre und Rassenkunde* [Heredity and Racial Studies]. 1938. Source: Musée du quai Branly.

and Greece as a supreme and “particularly beautiful” achievement of the “Indo-Germanic” race, a term typically used in Germany (Thieme 1936, 43).

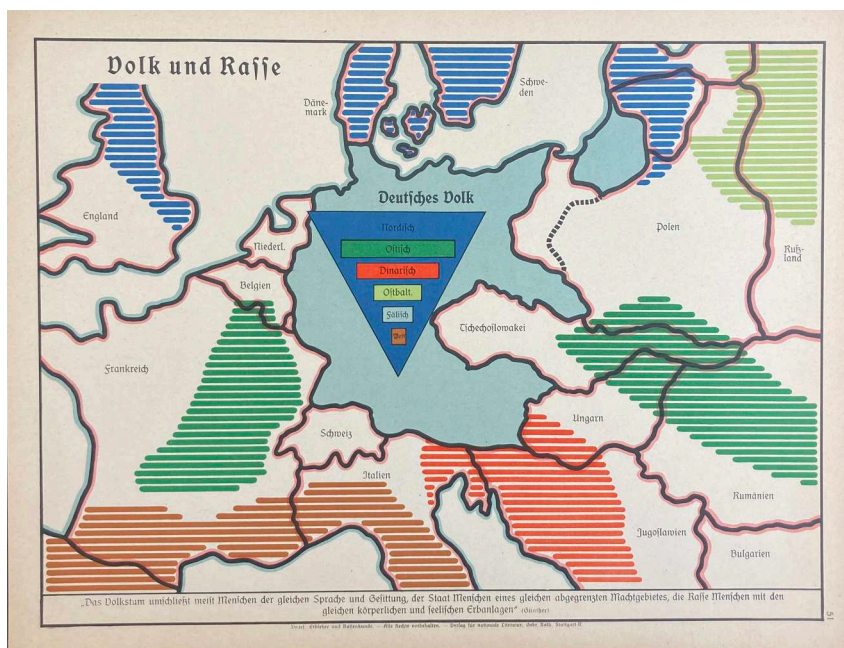


**Figure 11.** Roman and gothic on a map of Europe from the schoolbook *Vererbung /Rasse/Volk* By Erich Thieme, showing the “six Aryan races” of which the Germanic people were allegedly made, as well as two “non-Aryan” races, 1936, page 29.

As Leoussi (2015, 2016) has demonstrated, nation-building in European nations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was to a great extent image-oriented: ancient Greek marble sculptures, such as the Parthenon sculptures in the British Museum, or Roman copies of Greek statues, such as Myron’s *Discobolus* (460–450 BC), believed to exhibit the Aryan body in its athletic perfection, were appropriated as the ideal that government policies sought to make real through gymnastics in the bodies of their youth. The image of the Greek athlete was printed and reproduced in numerous publications in many European countries. In Germany, there was already a tradition of idealisation of the form of the Greek athletic body since the eighteenth century, by Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the father of European Neo-classicism. This was reinforced by racial ideas, and especially Aryanism. German nationalism, as Leoussi has pointed out, would, in fact, define the appearance and disposition of the national body by reference to both the harmony of the ancient Greek athletes and the vigour of the ancient Germanic tribes (2016, 6).

Aryan was, primarily, a visual concept. It refers to visual characteristics: the physical appearance of a distinct sub-division of humans. In being itself visual, the printed text lent itself to evocations of notions of Aryan in contrast to “non-Aryan”. Nazi schoolbooks propagandised Aryanness in printed form with images of the supposed Aryan people –





**Figure 12.** Map showing the “six Aryan races” of which the Germanic people was allegedly made. Poster number 70 from the schoolbook series *Erblehre und Rassenkunde* [Heredity and Racial Studies] by Alfred Vogel. 1938. Source: Musée du quai Branly.

showing their physical as well as cultural and behavioural characteristics – juxtaposed with texts styled in gothic typefaces or scripts, creating a gothic-German-Aryan visual association. The regime used images profusely to describe the kinds of body shape, physiognomy, and mentality permitted to German nationals – such as the photographs of Aryan and non-Aryan faces, with explanations in gothic, in the books by Thieme and Vogel (Figure 13).

### ***Opposition to gothic letterforms in the top Nazi leadership: the transformation of gothic into Jewish***

The Nazi Party used gothic letterforms as symbol of the Germanic-Aryan race. It was also the Nazi regime that would ban the use of gothic and institute the roman typeface as the official letterform in Germany. In January 1941, a circular announced that the use of gothic typefaces would cease and roman should be used instead. Underscored as “not for publication”, the text repeatedly stated that Hitler had given that order (Bormann 1941). Although the directive had to be kept strictly secret from the general public, through internal communications across the state sector (e.g. memos) it gradually imposed the complete typographic replacement nationwide. The international reach of the measure was clear: Hitler mandated that newspapers and magazines distributed abroad, or whose distribution abroad was desired, should appear in roman first. Roman would be preserved in Germany after the war.



**Figure 13.** Poster representing German children on the left and Jewish children on the right. Poster 56 from the schoolbook series *Erblehre und Rassenkunde* [Heredity and Racial Studies] by Alfred Vogel, 1938. Source: Musée du quai Branly.

The timing and priorities suggest that the change targeted the international news narrative about the invasion of Russia that Hitler planned for June 1941 – “Operation Barbarossa”. Perhaps the Nazis thought that roman would be more legible than gothic for international readers, a point that was reiterated many times in the 1911 Reichstag debate. Indeed, outside German-speaking territories, gothic had become an unfamiliar script, even though in the fifteenth century educated readers across Europe could master a broad range of gothic and roman styles of Latin. However, by the nineteenth century, gothic was perceived as a distinct alphabet linked to German.

Although international communication concerns tended to favour the use of roman typefaces at the expense of gothic, the 1941 directive, the so-called “Schriftverbot”, reveals a new Nazi interpretation of the gothic typeface. The first two sentences state: *“Die sogenannte gotische Schrift als eine deutsche Schrift anzusehen oder zu bezeichnen ist falsch. In Wirklichkeit besteht die sogenannte gotische Schrift aus Schwabacher Judenlettern”* [“It is false to regard or describe the so-called Gothic script as a German script. In reality, the so-called Gothic script consists of Schwabacher-Jewish letters”]. The directive further claimed that the Jews, who supposedly owned the early printing presses, provoked an influx of Schwabacher-Jewish letters. The word “Schwabacher” to designate the broader genre of gothic scripts and typefaces is curious because gothic was more commonly referred to as “Fraktur” and “German script” at the time. Although both the 1911 petition and the 1941 directive refer to roman by “Antiqua”, only the Nazis chose the word “Schwabacher” as a generic term for gothic, and this, in order to deny its gothicness. Schwabacher was a more specific term, associated with the gothic of Luther’s editions. It is possible that the Hitler-Bormann (1941) directive had anti-Lutheran and even anti-Christian motives.

According to Hastings (2003, 415) Dietrich Eckart and Hitler claimed that Luther was “the one who most disastrously paved the way” for the Jews; that Luther should not “have attacked Catholicism, but rather the Jews!”; that by acting “in accordance with the wishes of the Hebrews” Luther “spilled Aryan blood in torrents”; that Luther was “the unsuspecting cause of the German collapse”. Eckart and Hitler incited this hatred in the book *Der Bolschewismus von Moses bis Lenin: Zwiegespräch zwischen Adolf Hitler und Mir* [Bolshevism from Moses to Lenin: a Dialogue between Adolf Hitler and Me], published in 1924.

### ***The 1943 Ahnenerbe edition of Tacitus’ Germania: re-imagining Germans in roman script***

The Ahnenerbe, or the Society for Research into the Spiritual Roots of Germany’s Ancestral Heritage (Studiengesellschaft fuer Geistesurgeschichte Deutsches Ahnenerbe), was founded in Berlin on 1 July 1935 by SS chief Heinrich Himmler, Nazi ideologist Richard Walther Darré, and German-Dutch lecturer Herman Wirth (Ahnenerbe, n.d.). It was a research organisation within the SS (Schutzstaffel) and was committed to the SS racial-genealogical and ideological program. As is well-known, the SS was an organisation headed by Heinrich Himmler, with growing power, eventually accumulating police, intelligence, and military functions during the Second World War. The SS was responsible for atrocities that included the implementation and administration of concentration camps and the “Final Solution”.

Acting as a “cultural department” within the SS, the Ahnenerbe was one of the instruments to train SS members with the beliefs, worldview and behaviour envisioned by Himmler Kater ([1974] 2006). The institute included a publishing company that disseminated the kind of research aligned with Himmler’s agenda. Ahnenerbe members were SS officials and the institute was actively engaged, from 1942, in planning and carrying out mass killings and torture in concentration camps, and was engaged in extinguishing the culture of non-Germanic/non-Aryan people.

The institute sought to attract academics, promote teaching activities and present violence as “research on heritage”. The extremist ideas of Ahnenerbe were packaged in book

designs that conveyed a message of sobriety, accuracy, and normality. The books display clear and well-printed photographs and, above all, they are not ostentatious. Bearing an aura of neutrality, Ahnenerbe books went undetected by experienced librarians from the Library of Congress and New York Public Library, who did not recognise them as product of the SS. As Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt ([1954] 1973, 144) noted, “This failure was exactly what Heinrich Himmler and Wolfram Sievers, the minister of culture in Himmler’s personal SS empire, have intended”. Sievers was the de-facto organiser of the Ahnenerbe from 1935 through 1945. He was found guilty and sentenced to death in the Nuremberg Trials (HLSL [1946] 2016, 43).

From the editions published by the Ahnenerbe, a book that stands out is the 1943 edition of *Germania* written by Tacitus in c. 98 CE. The Ahnenerbe published *Germania* in an imposing and extravagant edition amid widespread death, devastation and Germany’s military defeats (e.g. in Stalingrad, 1942–1943). Such combination of form, material, and context of publication were not consistent with a conventional publishing business. If anything, the Ahnenerbe edition of *Germania* is representative of the desire and urgency to disseminate a specific message at any cost, against a profit-oriented rationality.

Proponents of Germanic Aryanism converted *Germania* into an authoritative proof that the Germanic race was unmixed by foreign blood, and was thus racially pure and unbeatable. Moreover, Tacitus’ text became a prescriptive rule about what Germanness should be. For example, in *Germania* one would find the claim, which the Nazi regime converted into national policy, that female participation in government caused the decline of the Germanic people: “*Suioni bus Sitonum gentes continuantur. Cetera similes uno differunt, quòd femina dominatur; in tantum non modo à libertate, sed etiam à servitute degenerant*” [“The Suiones have as neighbours the Sitones. They resemble in all respects, except that the Sitones are ruled by women: this is how low they have degenerated not only below liberty but even below slavery”] (Tacitus, [c. 98 CE] 1788, 432–433).

With introductory notes in German printed in roman typeface, the Ahnenerbe edition of *Germania* in Latin includes a facsimile of its oldest extant manuscript copy, handwritten in the fifteenth century in humanist script. As noted above, humanist calligraphers developed the humanist script to distance themselves from gothic scripts and symbolise the humanists’ interest in Graeco-Roman antiquity. This shows that for the Nazi publishers, it was not enough to publish Tacitus’ text: the materiality of the old manuscript was also considered necessary.

### **Roman letterforms as symbol of masculinity and domination in top Nazi leadership**

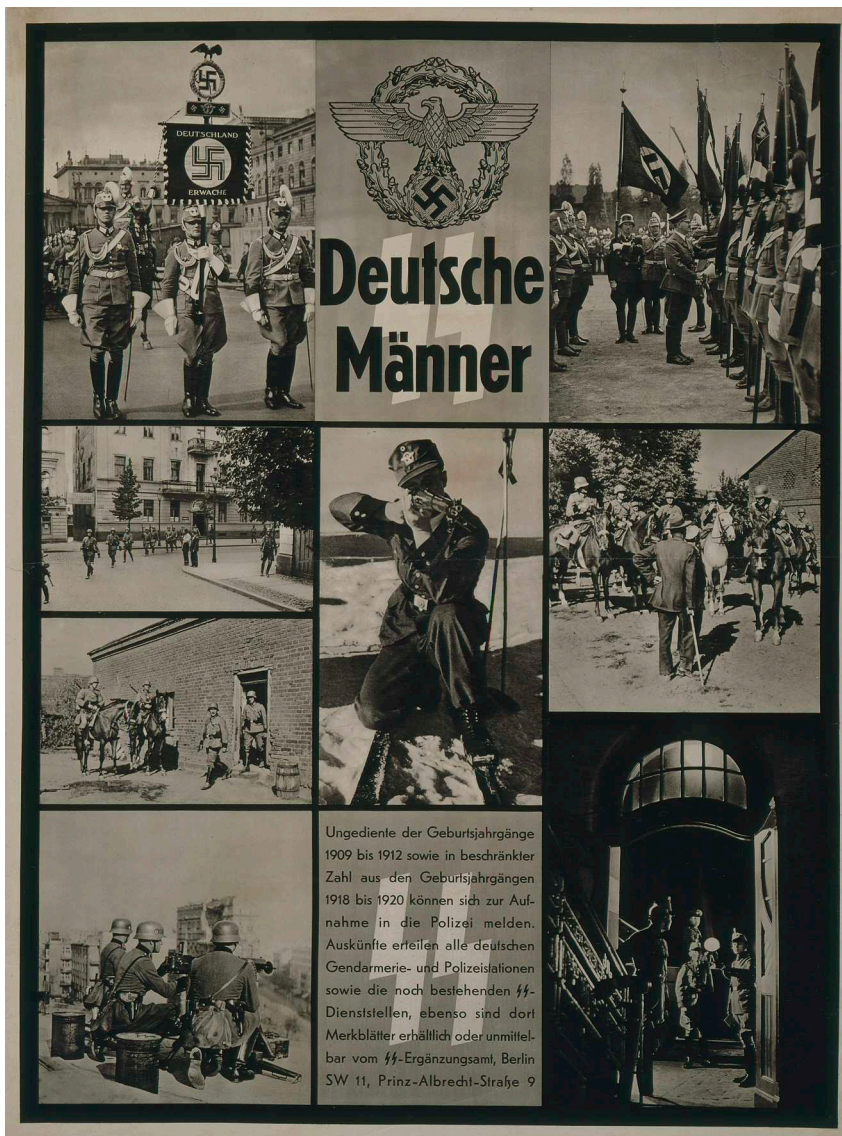
Already before 1941, the Nazis were using sans-serif roman letters. Widely used in modernist typography, sans-serifs are simplified roman letterforms which do not have small horizontal and vertical strokes at the end of the letter. The Nazis harnessed these typefaces as emblems of utmost Germanic male-centred supremacy. Hitler’s name was appearing in roman in Nazi propaganda (Figure 14) and in his own official letter paper before 1941. Most crucially, roman sans-serif was used to advertise the SS (Figure 15), whose visual identity, according to Michael Kater ([1974] 2006, 19, 56), was supervised by Himmler himself. It is true that the Nazi regime used both gothic and roman



**Figure 14.** Nazi party election poster showing Hitler's name in roman sans-serif letterform. 1932. Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

letterforms, often in combination, exploiting to the full the ideological connotations of the scripts. However, it is interesting to note that one would not typically find sans-serif roman typography in *NS Frauen-Warte*, the official women's magazine of the Nazi party, published between 1932 and 1945 and, from 1934, subtitled "the only party-authorised women's magazine". This indicates that the Nazi conception of gender roles was manifested in typographic differences that symbolically separated "male" from "female" (Waldeck 2020).

Governed by the belief in a supposed master race that was Germanic and male-dominated, Nazi ideology determined that the role of Aryan women was to grant the maximum biological reproduction of the accredited Aryan blood, like a copy machine replicating a prototype. This is quite literally shown in a photograph opening an article in *NS Frauen-Warte* in May 1941 (Figure 16). The text and additional images make clear that the delivery of the master race was up to women alone: the father was outside the picture. The text is in gothic with subheading in Sütterlin, the cursive writing taught to children in schools. Until 1945, almost all issues of *NS Frauen-Warte* had gothic typeface in the body text, as if the 1941 directive banning gothic did not apply



**Figure 15.** Roman sans-serif letterforms on a SS recruitment poster entitled “Deutsche Männer” [German Men]. 1938. Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Galerie Prospect.

to the party-authorised women’s magazine. In contrast, the change was quickly implemented in other periodicals, and especially in the Nazi Party daily newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*. This had headlines in roman in March 1941, and, from 15 August 1941, all body text was in roman.

Nazi propaganda used gothic to characterise with a distinct typographic identity its eugenics and euthanasia programme aimed to promote the master race. The typography of *NS Frauen-Warte* is consistent with the graphic material that promoted eugenics. The Nazi rule that instituted roman typefaces in Germany was postponed not only in *NS Frauen-Warte* but also in eugenics publications such as *Volk und Rasse*, which remained

**Mütterdienst**  
*Der große Dank an die  
 immer jugendlichen Mütter*

schafflichen und bevölkerungspolitischen Ziele des Staates in stiller Kleinarbeit innerhalb seiner Lehrgänge, seiner Sprechstunden, seiner Mütterabende zu unterstützen, indem er der Frau mit Rat und Tat zur Seite steht und ihr damit hilft, über Schwierigkeiten des täglichen Lebens und über manche Stunde der Sorge und Ermüdung hinwegzukommen. Die Frau und Mutter, die, in den Arbeitsprozess eingeschaltet, ein gerüttelt Maß an Arbeit leistet, und der Mann und Vater im Kriegseinsatz kämpfen für die gleichen Ziele, und gerade der deutsche Soldat in Russland, wo es eine Familie in unserer Sinne nicht gibt, weiß doppelt deutlich, wofür er sein Leben einsetzt. Er ist froh und betäubt, wenn er seine Familie in der Heimat betreut und versorgt weiß und nimmt regen Anteil an allem, was damit zusammenhängt. Dies geht u. a. immer wieder aus den Erzählungen der Soldatenbräute und -frauen hervor, die an den Mütterchulungslehrgängen teilnehmen und häufig aus ihren Selbstbriefen berichten.

Anschließend seien einige Beispiele im Wortlaut gebracht:  
 „Meine Frau hat bis jetzt gearbeitet. Sie erwartet nun ihr erstes Kind. Ich bitte Sie, meine Frau zu einem Mütterchulungsurlaub aufzufordern, in dem Sie auch Kochen und Nähen lernt. So kann Sie am besten die Zeit, in der ich nicht da bin, ausnützen.“  
 „Mein Mann hat geliebt: „Gue Didi um, wo Du Säuglingspflege lernen kannst. Jetzt, wo Du allein bist, mußt Du besonders gut für unser Kind sorgen.“ Da wurden mir von der Frauenstaffel die Mütterchulungsurlaube genannt, und nun bin ich hier und möchte an einem der Kurse teilnehmen.“  
 „Ich liebe meinem Mann die Bedeutung der Dornen abgeföhrien, und nun schreibt er mir aus dem Seibe. „Wenn unter Kind ein Mädchen ist, dann soll es Medizinstudien beiben, d. h. die Kämpferin.“ Mein Mann schreibt, es sei viel löhner, die Kämpferin nach ihrer Bedeutung auszubilden als nur nach dem Klang. Er schreibt weiter, wie gut es sei, daß in den Mütterchulungsurlaube auch solche Fragen Erwägung finden.“  
 „Mein Mann schreibt mir: „Das ist in dem Kurzus für Erzieherinnen beipreht, was müßt Du mir alles schreiben. Ich habe hier Zeit, über unsere Kinder nachzufragen, und wenn ich wieder komme, möchte ich auch einmal Belegenheit haben, einen solchen Lehrgang zu besuchen.“  
 „Ich bin so beruhigt, daß Du in der Mütterhilfe bist. Dort sind sicher sehr ordentliche Frauen, an die Du Dich anstellen kannst, und nun grüßel Du öffentlich nicht mehr soviel. Es freut mich besonders, daß Du mal wieder linst.“  
 „Wenn mein Mann auf Urlaub kommt, zeige ich ihm zuerst das neue Kleid und dann die Quittung über den Besuch eines Mütterchulungsurlaube in der Mütterchule, sonst glaubt er nicht, daß ich es selbst gemacht habe.“  
 „Mein Dreißter hat mit geföhrien, ich sollte als SS-„Braut in eine Bräuterchule gehen, denn dort würde ich in der Gemeinshaft Gleichgültiger auch ein bißchen Kameradschaft spüren.“

Bei der Umsiedlung Volksdeutscher in die Heimat und der Ansiedlung von Volks- und Reichsdeutschen in den rückgegliederten und neuergewonnenen Gebieten, vor allem im Gau Wartheland, leistet der Mütterdienst durch die Durchführung seiner Lehrgänge sehr wertvolle, ideale und praktische Hilfe. In den Lagern kommt zunächst das Notwendigste an Grundkenntnissen in Säuglingspflege und Haushaltung vermittelt werden. Die Voraussetzungen zu dieser Arbeit waren völlig andere als im Reich. Am leichtesten zu gewinnen waren die Umsiedler durch Erzählungen vom Führer und seinem Willen. Besonders aufgeschlossen wurde groß und Klein durch deutsches Spiel und Lied, das zu erstem, schönem Gemeinchaftsleben verband. Geplant ist im Gau Wartheland eine Landmütterchule, zu der die Frauen auch von weit abgelegenen Höhen und Dörfern mit Pferd und Wagen oder auch mit Bahn und Omnibus kommen. Das Haus ist als Schulungs- und Wohnhaus für die Teilnehmerinnen gedacht. In der Landmütterchule sollen die Ansiedlerfrauen in verkürzten Kursen, vor allem im Winter, wenn die Feldarbeit ruht, das Grundlegendste über Fragen der Haushaltungsführung, der Kinderpflege und -erziehung lernen. Gleichzeitig wird diese Schule wie auch die anderen Mütterchulen eine Stätte sein, die den Ansiedlerfrauen nationalsozialistisches Gedankengut vermittelt und ihnen Auftrieb und Halt gibt, sich in der neuen Heimat zu behaupten.

Überall wo der Mütterdienst neue Gebiete erschließt, tritt zunächst die Wanderlehrerin in Tätigkeit. In ihrem Wanderkoffer ist das wichtigste Schulungsmaterial untergebracht. Meist hat die Wanderlehrerin in einer kleinen Mütterchule ein wohnliches Zimmer, von dem aus sie ihre Fahrten unternimmt. Oft wohnt sie aber auch im Dorf bei einer der Kursteilnehmerinnen und lernt auf diese Weise die örtlichen Geäuftigkeiten und die Lebensumstände aus eigener Anschauung kennen. Gewöhnlich herrscht schon nach kurzer Zeit ein herzliches kameradschaftliches Verhältnis zwischen der Wanderlehrerin und den Müttern und Frauen, die in der Wanderlehrerin die Vertreterin des Reiches der nationalsozialistischen Weltanschauung und der deutschen Frau schlechthin erblicken. Gerade dies läßt die Arbeit der Wanderlehrerin besonders fruchtbar und befriedigend werden.

Aufnahme: Kriegerlicher-Kompanie

Aufnahme: Purpur

**Figure 16.** Representation of maternity in *NS Frauen-Warte*, the women’s magazine of the Nazi party. May 1941, page 276. Source: Universitäts-Bibliothek Heidelberg.

gothic after the 1941 directive. Furthermore, the connections between the role of women and eugenics is evidenced in the use of the same photograph on the covers of the January 1939 issue of *Volk und Rasse* and the May 1939 issue of *NS Frauen-Warte* (Figures 17 and 18).

*NS Frauen-Warte* readers were addressed as if they were considered the German national community deemed “fit to be copied”, in keeping with the national eugenics policies. Combining eugenics and “Blood and Soil” atmosphere of biological superiority, fertility, and attachment to the land, the graphic identity of *NS Frauen-Warte* included gothic typefaces and photographs set in bright bucolic landscapes. It was always sunny, the sky



**Figure 17.** January 1939 cover of *Volk und Rasse*. Source: Elbląska Biblioteka Cyfrowa.

was always clear and there was always peaceful countryside in *NS Frauen-Warte* illustrations and photographs. The other side of the picture was the reality of mass extermination, as the SS was putting into action the final solution and documenting it with roman-related lettering in its “male” written communications.

### ***Race and print-language***

The Nazi party used the printed language as a symbolic instrument of racial ideology and gender dominance, conveying Aryanist visual meanings that cut across different communities of languages. In the symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1989) of the Jewish badge, for example, the pseudo-Hebrew letterforms stamped different languages with a common antisemitic Aryanist visual message. Our study showed that Benedict Anderson’s concept of “print-language” is limited in its explanatory value as a factor in nation-building, and it is necessary to take into account the printed language – the letterforms in which a language is printed.

While the printed language is something physical, observable in printed outputs, “print-language” is a conceptual construct that neutralises the materiality of language.





**Figure 18.** May 1939 cover of *NS Frauen-Warte*. Source: Universitäts-Bibliothek Heidelberg.

It erases the visuality which Febvre and Martin ([1958] 2010) and Steinberg (1955) had emphasised in their historical research which had been the source of Benedict Anderson's concept of print-language. The narrative of print-language insists that vernacular languages are neutral abstract systems that gather people into horizontal communities. This narrative overshadows the language-related symbolic violence, notably that of the graphic language of racist graphic ideologies.

National policies of printed language instituted in 1911 and 1941 in Germany showed the national significance of choices between gothic or roman letterforms, a significance which the Nazi movement exploited intensively. In contrast, Anderson in *Imagined Communities* ([1983] 2006, 46) defines "national print-languages" as the official languages of a nation, irrespective of script and typography. Nazism is mentioned only once in the book:

The fact of the matter is that nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations, transmitted from the origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations: outside history. Niggers are, thanks to the invisible tar-brush, forever niggers; Jews, the seed of Abraham, forever Jews, no matter what passports they carry or what languages they speak and read. (Thus for the Nazi, the Jewish German was always an impostor) (Anderson, [1983] 2006, 149)

Anderson has already been criticised for neglecting ethnic and racial divisions inside the imagined communities of nations, by scholars such as Partha Chatterjee (1991), Eric Foner (1997) and Margaret Franz and Kumarini Silva (2020). Furthermore, in the chapter “Patriotism and Racism”, Anderson dissociated language from biology or race: “from the start the nation was conceived in language, not in blood” ([1983] 2006, 145). However, language was indeed imagined as derived from blood in the Aryan myth, and this imagination was expressed in the printed language, as the Nazi movement did. The Jewish badge is a conversion of such imagination into symbolic violence.

As we tried to show, under Nazi control, letterforms served to classify and distinguish between the Aryan “master race” and the inferiors “non-Aryans”. The objective reality of the printed language creates distinctions rather than a horizontal imagined community. According to *Imagined Communities*, nations emerged out of a sense of shared experience given by the newspaper, the novel, and print-language, as readers imagined themselves connected into a national-linguistic fellowship with other readers who lived the same events at the same time and in the same geographical region. But uses and abuses of letterforms to distinguish groups of readers have been part of the history of typography for centuries and conflict with this notion of language as vehicle of shared experience.

## Conclusion

Different uses of the printed language draw and redefine different kinds of group membership. Different German governments in the first half of the twentieth century tried to regulate and standardise the printed language. This they did in the name of different symbols and beliefs. In 1911, the Reichstag rejected a petition that would replace gothic with roman in official communications and as the primary educational script. This rejection was largely justified by claims that gothic was the “German script” because it was itself a piece of German national identity, and because it epitomised and symbolised German national identity: Lutheranism and the Bible, German literature, embodied in Goethe, German national unity, and German craftsmanship, and discipline. By contrast, the Nazi party invested the printed language with a different vision of the German nation as an Aryan empire, even proclaiming in 1941 that gothic was *not* the “German script”.

From the perspective of the Aryan myth, roman was the de facto Aryan letterform because of its sustained and widespread use in European languages and deep-seated symbolic association with classical antiquity. The Nazi-imposed change of the printed language from gothic to roman affirmed a primordial/biological Europe-specific racial-linguistic connection that was the cornerstone of the Aryan myth. However, there was a limit to the interpretability of a government-led graphic ideology imposed on the population: interpretability depended on people’s repertoire and we found no evidence that the Nazi regime, after internally calling gothic a “Jewish letter”, did indeed use gothic to refer to Jews. The claim that gothic was Jewish would not resonate with the public, as it departed radically from established graphic ideologies and traditions around gothic.

Gothic and roman letterforms, in combination with written content and overall graphic design, reinforced graphically Nazi ideological distinction between “national” and “foreign” in the Nazi posters, schoolbooks, books, periodicals, and badges that we analysed. The Aryan myth was of overriding importance, informing the use of letterforms as the supposed geographical distribution of Aryans erased political frontiers, changing

the very meaning of national and foreign. Having selected printed material representative of different situations and intended readership, we found a common pattern of racial-national use of letterforms to symbolise *nationals as Aryans* as opposed to *foreigners as non-Aryans*. Our selected material indicates that gender-related distinctions within the Aryan race could be even more strongly emphasised through different typefaces.

The continuous propagation of beliefs about race and script, together with sustained and continuous use of scripts invested with these beliefs in printed artefacts, were necessary for meaning construction around letterforms and scripts, building their interpretability. Governments could actively influence interpretability. When the printed text is perceived as transparent there is a misrecognition of this kind of symbolic process.

In this article, we traced how Germanness was imagined and conceptualised through use of letterforms, and specifically use of gothic and roman letterforms in printed publications during two periods: during the development of printed letterforms across Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; and during the Nazi period, focusing on the Nazi official press. We traced the history of gothic and roman letterforms and their symbolic associations (e.g. Christian, European/German-national, Protestant/Catholic, Graeco-Roman/Classical-Humanist), in order to show, first, how the Nazi movement harked back to European and German traditions of letterforms, in order to re-constitute an authentic German national identity; and second, how, through specific uses of gothic and roman letters in its numerous publications, the Nazi movement transformed these letterforms into vehicles of the antagonism between Aryan and Semite. We further showed the fluidity and inversion of the racial meanings of the two scripts as the gothic script's meaning could become attached with equal passion both to Germanness and Jewishness. At the same time, roman and gothic scripts would become gendered, the former becoming a carrier of a vision of mature masculinity and the latter of femininity and childhood. Theoretically, the article qualifies and builds on Anderson's concept of "print-language" by making a distinction between "print-language" and "printed language" – the latter pointing to the materiality and form of the printed language that bear meaning and have their own, symbolic power to divide or unite communities.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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