

Entrance Hall

Mythos Varusschlacht

The Myth Varus Battle

The range of the MYTH exhibition is from Roman historiography to modern research and shows what effects the Varus Battle had on German and European history. How did a historical event, the battle, become a myth which even in Roman times, but even more so since the end of the Middle Ages till the present was appropriated for political conflicts at any given time and for national goals? How did Arminius/Hermann become the first German and the Germanic tribes people the ancestors of the Germans? The works of ancient authors, particularly Tacitus' *Germania*, provide the basis for the myth around Arminius and the Germanic peoples. The picture of the Germanic tribes drawn there, of necessity a subjective one, is juxtaposed in the exhibition with modern archaeological findings and is critically interrogated. The Germans' historical and political longings and sensitivities, all of which circle around the subject of national unity, military self-assertion and identity, are crystallised in the figure of Arminius/Hermann.

Die Varusschlacht – Ereignis und Echo

The Varus Battle – Event and Echo

9 A.D. – The Roman governor, Publius Quinctilius Varus, and his army are lured into ambush by a coalition of Germanic tribes under the leadership of the Cheruscian, Arminius, and are totally destroyed. In an battle over several days three legions and their baggage train, all in all about 20.000 people are wiped out. Faced by this hopeless situation Varus commits suicide.

Attempts by Rome, under Emperor Augustus, to conquer Germania between the Rhine and Elbe preceded The Varus battle (or Battle in the Teutoburg Forest). There was to be a province of Germania and towns were founded. The rebellion under Arminius cancelled these ambitions. After further unsuccessful incursions, Rome withdrew its troops from Germania to the right of the Rhine and abstained from imposing direct rule.

This decision had a decisive influence on the further course of European history. While Roman civilisation continued to flourish on the Rhine and Danube in the following centuries, Germania to the right of the Rhine largely evaded Roman rule and civilisation. This area was an important point of departure for the migration of the peoples, which led to the decline of the Western Roman Empire. Numerous new states came into being in the area which shape the face of Europe even today.

60 Quadratmeter Mythos

60 Square Metres of Myth

The Düsseldorf painter, Peter Janssen the Elder (1844-1908), was commissioned in 1870 to paint a cycle of murals for the Krefeld town hall. Instead of the scenes from the history of Krefeld ordered from him he handed in sketches on the "Hermann Battle" – in his own words – to "visualise the consequences of unity and disunity and the lack of a Fatherland".

Janssen's sketches were felt to be convincing on the eve of the founding of the Reich. He painted nine large-sized pictures up to 1873, all in all over 60 square metres with powerful scenes from the Varus Battle and the life of the Cheruscan prince, Arminius.