Looking at Bernhard Kummer’s writings, one could easily get the impression that the impact of National Socialist ideology could severely damage a thinking subject and its expressions. In other, more moderate words: Ideological tendencies have undermined a reasoning which otherwise could have introduced into contemporary academic discussions some new, fruitful and thought-provoking perspectives with regard to the analysis and description of the old German culture and religion. It seems at least questionable whether Kummer’s publications should be a matter for serious academic discussion or not. Too much ideological propaganda or, what Walter Baetke calls “wishful thinking,” has slipped into the texts and has rendered them useless outside a specific mental context, which is influenced by National Socialism or a comparable fascist ideology.\(^2\)

But it would be too easy to stop here and put the writings of Bernhard Kummer aside. They are in different ways both dangerous and instructive: Kummer’s work gives insights into the persuasive function of ideology, in particular how critical questions are eliminated and how one’s thinking is obstructed by implicit convictions which are taken for granted without reflection. The suggestive style of Kummer’s writings exerts a convincing sway over the author as well as his readers. The power of persuasion is increased by the authority which Kummer

\(^1\) For their efforts to improve the English of the presented article I would like to sincerely thank Vanessa Cisz and the always patient Chris Collins (his son Luis predominantly had the proper reactions with regard to the presented papers).

claimed by emphasizing his affiliation to the academic world.³ The short time he spent at the University of Jena as professor of German and Nordic language and literature gave his publications a lasting scholarly aura despite his dismissal after the end of the Hitler regime. Thus in contemporary neo-Nazi circles, Kummer’s writings are still used as academic legitimation for their crude opinions.⁴ With the superficial academic framework of his texts Kummer generates the appearance of scientifically proven truth and capitalizes on the social appreciation of scholarship.⁵ Applying Pierre Bourdieu’s description of the pre-1968 French university field to the circumstances under which Kummer’s career proceeded, the style of his argumentation could be characterized as “a rhetoric of scientificity” to impress the text’s scholarly quality upon the readers.⁶ Kummer’s academic habit could support the publisher’s efforts to sell his books, and the strategy paid off: Kummer was recommended in promotional articles as one of the most capable scholars writing about the religion and culture of the Germans. Kummer was praised in particular for his ability to

³ On the front pages of his books Kummer frequently added the “Dr.” to his name, cf. Dr. Bernhard Kummer, *Mission als Sittenwechsel. Mit einer Antwort an Prof. D Rückert: ‘Die kulturelle und nationale Bedeutung der Missionierung Germaniens für das deutsche Volk’* (Leipzig: Adolf Klein Verlag, 1933) and idem, *Herd und Altar. Wandlungen altnordischer Sittlichkeit im Glaubenswechsel, vol. 1: Persönlichkeit und Gemeinschaft* (Leipzig: Adolf Klein Verlag, 1934), and vol. 2: *Der Machtkampf zwischen Völk, König und Kirche im alten Norden* (Leipzig: Adolf Klein Verlag, 1939). Publishing under addition of the academic title, besides marketing reasons, was in particular not unusual in the case of authors with strong ideological tendencies. It seems that these writers were aware of their scholarly deficiencies and therefore tried to compensate this by pointing out their academic qualification.

⁴ The new neo-right radical Jürgen Rieger called, for instance, Kummer’s *Midgards Untergang* a publication without any voelkish bias (www.asatru.de/lp_gewalt.htm), likewise a Dr. Herbert Lenz in the *Nordische Zeitung* edited by Rieger. Lenz refers to Kummer’s article “Die Wikinger: Räuber oder Helden?,” in Bernhard Kummer et al., eds., *Der nordische Mensch der Wikingerzeit* (Leipzig: Adolf Klein Verlag, 1935), pp. 3–24 in order to demonstrate the fortitude and ethical perfection of the Old Vikings. See also www.nordzeit.de/wikzug.htm.


⁶ Cf. Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, p. 28 (German translation, p. 70). Despite some evident differences between the academic situation in Germany under the impact of National Socialism and the circumstances at French universities before 1968, it seems possible and fruitful to use Bourdieu’s analysis to explain the conditions in which Kummer’s writing and acting unfolded.