Recently, scholars have become increasingly interested in the history of political myths. One product of this trend is a volume recently published by the Herder Institute entitled *Political Myths in 19th and 20th Century Central and Eastern Europe*. This book, edited by historians Heidi Hein-Kircher and Hans Henning Hahn, features articles written by participants in a summer academy on “Politische Mythen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Perspektiven historischer Mythosforschung” [Political Myths in 19th and 20th Century: Perspectives of Historical Research on Myths] held by the Herder Institute in 2004. It also includes contributions from a panel chaired by Hein-Kircher at the 45th Deutscher Historikertag entitled “Mythos und Raum in Ostmitteleuropäischen Grenzregionen” [Myth and Space in East Central European Borderlands]. In their preface, the editors’ state their intention to use the volume to stimulate more research on political myths and move the field in new directions.

The 26 articles are divided into four thematic sections, framed by an introduction and a concluding discussion about the typology of political myths. The majority of contributions (twelve) deal with the territories of Germany and Poland, or their respective borderlands. Estonia, Slovakia, Bohemia, Austria, Hungary, Albania, Moldova and Bulgaria are each discussed by one contribution, and two articles cover Russia/Soviet Union. With regard to regional distribution, there is a strong representation of (Eastern) Central Europe over Eastern Europe.

The introduction to the volume, “Politische Mythen” [Political Myths] by Yves Bizeul, is a reflection on political myths as a concept for historical analysis. Political myths are defined as narrations of the origins of a political era and/or a political space (which Bizeul defines as an achieved and/or desired territory) often linked to single persons or heroes (4). Bizeul distinguishes the term political myth from utopia and ideology and further points to its ambiguous character of having both conservatory (integration, social cohesion) and emancipatory effects (14). The definition might be too broad for direct application to specific cases, but it is thought-provoking and offers one way of framing “political myth” as a concept.

The first thematic section of the volume consists of seven contributions gathered under the label “Myth-Media.” This section explores the ways myths are communicated through various forms of media. Detlef Hoffmann presents theoretical reflections on the role of non-verbal memory (“Non-Verbale Erinnerung”). He characterizes these as complementary to verbal narratives which create links to the present by visually manifesting myths, e.g. the convention to portray Zeus with a beard. In her contribution on early Soviet propaganda
posters, Nicola Hille provides an exemplary analysis of the visual expression of political myths. She argues that the rise of Stalin's political influence is visually documented and shifted from his image of Lenin's pupil to the author of the revolution. Janis Augsburger and Katja Ludwig deal with the role of literature in creating and disseminating political myths. Augsburger deals with author Bruno Schulz's concept of myth and the influence of the glorification of Piłsudski on his historical interpretations, which she identifies as an “anti-analytisches Bedürfnis” [anti-analytical desire] to interpret history. Ludwig describes the romanticist August Wilhelm Schlegel's reception of the “Nibelungenlied”, the medieval epic of the hero Siegfried, as politically motivated. According to her, Schlegel's interpretation has to be seen in the light of his political convictions and in the context of the Napoleonic Wars. In his contribution analyzing the perception of the 1943 bombing of Hamburg, Malte Thießen demonstrates the dynamics and longevity of mythified narratives and their impact on urban self-perception. According to Thießen, rather than leading to a deconstruction of myths the passing of time leads to the construction of new myths. Alexandra Kaiser gives yet another example of the persistence and longevity of myths by focusing on the rituals of the “Volkstrauertag” [Memorial Day] by three different political regimes, the Weimar Republic, Nazi Germany, and the Federal Republic of Germany. The last contribution in this section by Vasile Dumbravă deals with public memorial statues as a medium of representing and perpetuating political myths. Through an analysis of the discourse on memorials in Moldova, he shows that memorials play a central role in the tension between remembering and forgetting and are crucial in shaping the discourse on national identity.

A compelling contribution of János M. Bak on the persistence of the myth of the Hungarian conquest from medieval to modern times opens the second thematic section on the “inevitability” of mythic concepts of history. Bak traces the changing instrumentalization of the myth that served as a symbol for the rights of the nobility in the 15th and 16th century, was portrayed as representing the ‘thousand year old constitution’ of Hungary in parliamentary debates in the 19th century, and at the turn of the twentieth century was used to legitimize the dominance of ethnic Hungarians in the Hungarian kingdom. Ingo Wiwjorra analyzes the crucial role of anthropologists at the end of the 19th century in transforming the romanticist perception of the Germanic myth into a politically viable asset that was later used to counter a deficit of legitimacy and propagate autochthony. Hans Henning Hahn and Eva Hahn deal with the myth of expulsion (“Vertreibung”) in Germany from 1945 to 2005. They demonstrate how several different sequences of events were merged into the label “expulsion” and how much this collective term (with strong biblical allusions) still dominates public debate, preventing a critical reassessment. In his contribution, Gabriel Eikenberg scrutinizes the role of the mythification of German culture for the self-identification of the Jewish minority in Austria from 1918 to 1938. According to Eikenberg’s analysis, the discourse in the Jewish press of the time featured a selective interpretation of German culture, constitutive for Austrian Jewish self-identification. Stefan Guth deals with the role of Polish and German historians of the interwar period and distinguishes between “logos” (represented by historians) and “mythos” (represented by citizens, patriots). Historians, he argues, played a crucial role in reconciling “logos” and “mythos” by adding to the corpus of national myths. Marina Liakova convincingly explores the dichotomy between the historical concept and meanings of “Europe” and “Islam” as myths in public discourse in present-day Bulgaria. The final contribution of this section, by Miloslav Szabó analyzes the works of