

The Rhythm of Eternity

**The German Youth Movement and the Experience of the Past
(1900-1933)**

Het ritme van de eeuwigheid

De Duitse jeugdbeweging en de ervaring van het verleden (1900-1933)

PROEFSCHRIFT

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Preface

When I started my research in 2008, I was a total stranger to the history of the German youth movement. At least I did know that there had been (and still is) a youth movement in Germany, that it had significant cultural influence and that it left behind a great variety of source material. When an earlier topic for my PhD thesis proved to be untenable due to a lack of primary sources, the youth movement came to me as – as they would call it – destiny. A first visit to castle Ludwigstein Castle in Hesse – where the youth movement’s archives are housed – provided an immediate introduction in youth movement culture as I sat beside the campfire singing German folk songs with youth movement ‘seniors’. The experience was heart-warming and alienating at the same time for I felt welcomed as a foreign guest, but also felt like an intruder, impeding the rites and customs of old friends reuniting. After explaining next day to prof. dr. Jürgen Reulecke what my intended research would focus on, he started elaborating on his own childhood experiences in the youth movement, concluding that I should not forget ‘experience’ (*Erlebnis*). Puzzled if he meant his own childhood experiences or my experiences that weekend, I only realized later that it must have been experience *per se*. Experience would become a key concept in my analysis, and had I not been grasped by my own experience of hospitality and intrusion I would probably have missed the importance of irrationalism and its consequences for historical thought.

Yet, the completion of this study is not only the result of experience. It is the result of tiresome labour, of reading and re-reading sources and literature, of mastering the meaning of the specific idiom of a foreign youth culture, of finding unavailable books and articles, of writing and re-writing notes and chapters and of very few bright moments. As solitary as the work of a historian may seem, he cannot do without a supportive environment. Therefore, I would like to thank my wife Maaïke, my family and friends. A few good laughs with them kept me living in the present.

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List of abbreviations

AWV	Alt-Wandervogel
DB	Wandervogel, Deutscher Bund für Jugendwanderungen
DbaSt	Deutsche Bund abstinenter Studenten
JWV	Jung-Wandervogel
Steglitzer e.V.	Wandervogel, Eingetragener Verein zu Steglitz Berlin
Wandervogel e.V.	Wandervogel e.V., Bund für deutsches Jugendwandern