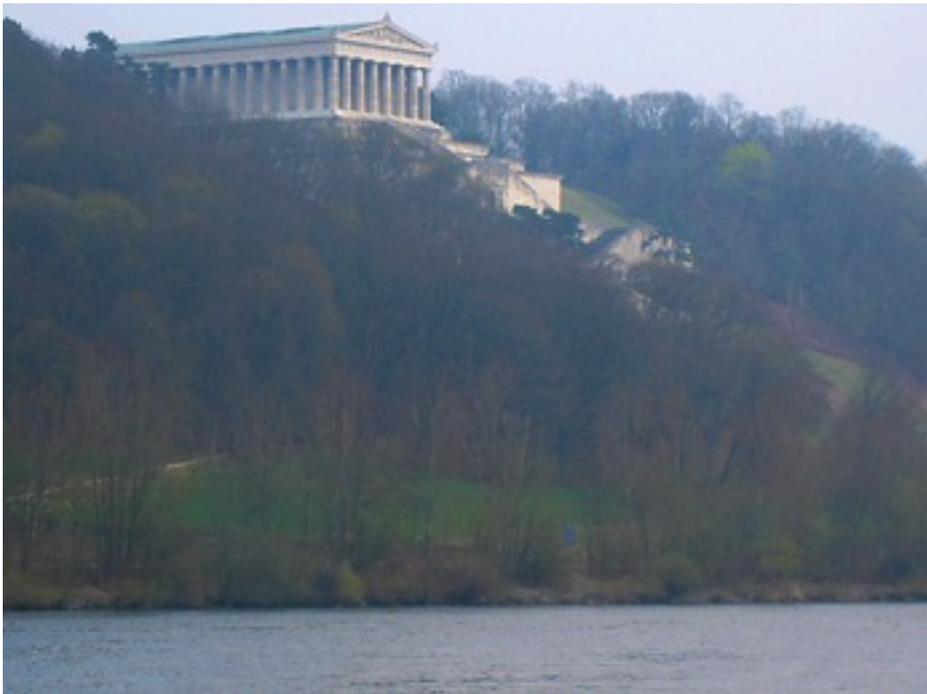


## Downstream from Regensburg

Downstream from Regensburg the city's docks spread out on the south side of the river. Phalanxes of cranes are kept busy hauling cargoes of grain, fertilizer, and steel from barges, and loading them onto the railway wagons or articulated trucks waiting on the quayside. The port facilities seem slick and modern rather than grimy and decrepit: in an age given over to rapid transport by road or rail or air, the river still forms a vital transport link through Europe, and the barges lined up against the wharfs bear the names of ports far downstream – Budapest, Belgrade, or Galați in Romania, or even Sulina on the Black Sea; the names painted on the bows of some of the ships are written in Bulgarian, Serbian or Russian Cyrillic. Not much barge traffic continues upriver from here to Kelheim and the Canal, and it is at the docks of Regensburg, for the first time, that the sense of the Danube forming a bridge between two halves of Europe – old and new, East and West – becomes readily apparent.

A few kilometres beyond the docks a whitewashed version of the Parthenon pokes incongruously above the trees on the summit of a hillside that rises steeply from the north bank of the river. This is the Walhalla, an extraordinary, almost kitschy monument from the early nineteenth century, taking its architectural influence from Greece and its name from



the fabled resting place of Nordic warriors. It is yet another whimsical folly dreamed up by King Ludwig of Bavaria to celebrate his dream of a united Germany: an unidentical twin for Ludwig's other shameless architectural indulgence, the Befreiungshalle above Kelheim. With its heavy whitewashed columns and grandiose flights of steps leading up from the river, the Walhalla is a curious

but eye-catching structure that has drawn comments, mostly negative, from a succession of travel writers through the ages. Negley Farson, sailing past it in his yawl, looked up and saw a “stray bit of Greece [that looms] ghostly and unreal against the tempestuous sky.” Bill and Laurel Cooper, who skippered their barge in the Aegean before navigating it down the Danube, thought the place looked “incredibly wrong without the wash of Greek sunshine... cold, white and plastic, lost in this northern forest.” Nowadays the Walhalla has been commandeered as a popular excursion from Regensburg. On busy days tourist boats disgorge their passengers every hour or so onto the landing stage at the bottom of the steps

below the Walhalla, while the laden barges drift past them in the main channel, trailing a V-shaped wake behind them.

When Ludwig built the Walhalla he honoured within its walls one hundred and eighteen artists, composers, sculptors, writers and politicians whom he considered guardians of the German soul. Now the number of busts and plinths lining the marble-lined interior of the main hall has increased to one hundred and sixty-one – and every so often this tally increases by one more. The latest bust to have been added was that of Sophie Scholl, the celebrated leader of the White Rose Resistance Movement; she was just twenty-two when her passive opposition to the Nazis led her and her brother Hans to their executions in Munich in 1943. The bust of Sophie depicts the face of a thoughtful young woman with hair



curled into a distinctive forties bob; *im gedenken an alle, die gegen unrecht, gewalt und terror des dritten reiches mutig widerstand leisteten*, reads the caption underneath. *In Memory of all those who courageously resisted injustice, violence and terror in the*

*Third Reich*. The other, older personalities whose busts and memorial plaques line the echo-beaten walls of the Walhalla are a motley collection: Kant and Schiller rub shoulders with one another along one row, while along another are a bewigged Bach and a chin-thrusting Wagner. Close by are bearded Kepler and moustachioed Bismarck; a fleshy-faced Konrad Adenauer is positioned alongside an equally jowly Brahms, while above them is the skeletal, aged and distinguished visage of the scientist Wilhelm Gottfried Leibniz.

Somewhat alarmingly, Ludwig's definition of 'German' is a broad one that includes those who would normally be thought of as Austrian, Dutch, Swiss or English – a form of cultural appropriation that has an unfortunate, distant progeny in the form of Hitler's *lebensraum*: so the three men of Rütli Meadow, who founded modern Switzerland, and Horsa, the leader of the Saxon tribes who settled in Kent, and Egbert, *Erster Koenig von England* (the first King of England), and William of Orange, and Rubens, and Mozart, line the walls of the hall enjoying the same veneration as Beethoven, Mahler, Goethe and the other giants of German culture and history that you would rightly expect to find here.