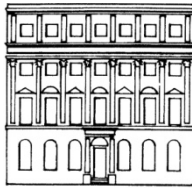


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ARTICLE

PRUSSIA AND THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE 1700–40

PETER H. WILSON

Constitutions and Culture

Our understanding of the Holy Roman Empire has been transformed in the last fifty years. The older, ‘Borussian interpretation’ dismissed the Empire in its last two centuries as moribund and doomed to be supplanted by dynamic, centralizing ‘power states’ like Prussia.¹ A succession of historians since the 1960s have identified how imperial institutions performed important coordinating functions, repelled external attacks, resolved internal conflicts, and safeguarded an impressive and surprisingly robust range of individual and corporate rights for ordinary inhabitants.² More recently, some have suggested this positive reappraisal presents the old Empire as a blueprint for the German Federal Republic or the European Union. Others prefer to characterize the Empire as, at best, only ‘partially modernized’ and still defective in comparison with most other, especially western European countries.³

I would like to thank Andreas Gestrich, Michael Schaich, and Thomas Biskup for their helpful suggestions and comments on this article.

¹ A view still expressed by some today, e.g. Heinrich August Winkler, *Germany: The Long Road West*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2006), i. 4–46.

² This positive view of the Empire is presented succinctly by one of its prominent proponents, Georg Schmidt, ‘The Old Reich: The State and Nation of the Germans’, in R. J. W. Evans, Michael Schaich, and Peter H. Wilson (eds.), *The Holy Roman Empire 1495–1806* (Oxford, 2011), 43–62. See also Karl Otmar Freiherr von Aretin, *Das Alte Reich 1648–1806*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart, 1993–7); Joachim Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire, 1495–1806*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2012).

³ Examples of these critiques in Matthias Schnettger (ed.), *Imperium Romanum – irregulare corpus – Teutscher Reichs-Staat: Das Alte Reich im Verständnis der Zeitgenossen und der Historiographie* (Mainz, 2002).

This debate remains unresolved, but clearly focuses on the traditional German historical themes of state and nation-building. These topics will no doubt persist, and can probably only be resolved through more extensive comparisons with other European states and societies.⁴ The focus on institutions and identity has been supplemented recently by a partially separate discussion of political culture, inspired by the 'linguistic turn' in the humanities and by anthropological studies of ritual and communication. The new constitutional history developing since the 1960s countered the Borussian interpretation by re-examining the activities of imperial institutions in the fields which nineteenth-century historians considered important: war and diplomacy, legislation, the judiciary, and economic coordination. By contrast, the new cultural approach addresses a key reason why earlier historians believed the Empire to be irrelevant. Anyone reading the ponderous deliberations of the *Reichstag* (imperial diet) and other imperial institutions will soon see that these were indeed much preoccupied with matters of status, precedence, and posturing. The difference is that, whereas earlier historians dismissed such concerns as irrelevant to 'real' history, modern culturalists argue they are central aspects of symbolic communication and political legitimization through performance.⁵

One obvious conclusion is that the Empire remained ambiguous and cannot be defined by examining its formal structure alone. However, it is one thing to point out that the Empire 'was not an objectively established fact; it did not lead an independent existence beyond the actions, perceptions, and attributions of contemporaries'.⁶ It is quite another to claim that this means the Empire was

⁴ For steps in this direction, see R. J. W. Evans and Peter H. Wilson (eds.), *The Holy Roman Empire, 1495–1806: A European Perspective* (Leiden, 2012).

⁵ The cultural approach is also known as the 'Münster school' after its origins in a major research project at that university. Its theoretical basis and its development can be found in Jason P. Coy, Benjamin Marschke, and David Warren Sabean (eds.), *The Holy Roman Empire Reconsidered* (New York, 2010). See also Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, 'On the Function of Rituals in the Holy Roman Empire', in Evans, Schaich, and Wilson (eds.), *The Holy Roman Empire*, 359–73.

⁶ Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, *Des Kaisers alte Kleider: Verfassungsgeschichte und Symbolsprache des alten Reiches* (Munich, 2008), 249.

‘essentially fictive’.⁷ It is legitimate to ask whether any human institutions have an independent existence beyond those who inhabit or interact with them. When pushed to its logical conclusion, however, the culturalist approach risks unwittingly reviving the Borussian presentation of the Empire as irrelevant to ‘real’ history. It perpetuates the distinction between the wider imperial framework, represented by institutions like the *Reichstag*, and the territorial states, like Bavaria and Hanover, which collectively composed the Empire. The Empire is reduced to ‘a society of princes and nobles’ which ‘was not an authority present in [the] daily world’ of ordinary subjects.⁸ This misses the key insight from the new constitutional history which identifies the complementary character of the Empire in its exercise of authority and political functions on several levels.⁹ The history of the individual territories cannot be divorced from that of the Empire; both must be read together to appreciate how each functioned.

We need to combine the broad reinterpretation of the Empire’s institutional history with the cultural approach’s reappraisal of ritual as integral to imperial political culture. The former demonstrates the Empire’s relative effectiveness in material terms: money raised, troops mobilized and deployed, judicial verdicts passed and enforced. These outcomes clearly impacted on daily lives and made the Empire ‘real’ to at least some of its ordinary inhabitants. However, the largely positive reassessment of imperial institutions often presents a schizophrenic picture, as participation and compliance was far higher amongst the smaller territories concentrated in the south and west than in the larger ones of the north and east. The cultural approach helps explain why the Empire endured despite these spatial, as well as chronological variations in coherence. Regardless of size and ambition, all territories legitimized their claims and aspirations in similar ways. This common political culture sustained the Empire, whilst simultaneously curtailing its effectiveness in material terms, and limiting the options of its political actors. This insight is an important corrective to the more enthusiastic proponents of the

⁷ André Krischer, ‘New Directions in the Study of the Holy Roman Empire: A Cultural Approach’, in Coy, Marschke, and Sabeian (eds.), *Holy Roman Empire Reconsidered*, 265–70 at 267.

⁸ This distinction is claimed by Krischer, ‘New Directions’, 269.

⁹ An argument developed by Georg Schmidt, *Geschichte des Alten Reiches: Staat und Nation in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Munich, 1999).

Empire's reappraisal who tend to over-emphasize modernity in institutional forms, rather than recognizing pre-modernity in political behaviour.

This article will illustrate this by examining Prussia's relations with the Empire between 1700 and 1740.¹⁰ There are several specific reasons for selecting this example and timeframe. Writing on Prussia still routinely ignores the fact that over half of its subjects still lived within the Empire even after its political centre of gravity shifted eastwards with the three partitions of Poland.¹¹ The history of Prussian *Reichspolitik*, or political relations with the Empire, remains largely unwritten.¹² When covered, it is usually presented through the classic dualist model focusing on Austro-Prussian antagonism, and prematurely reducing the rest of the Empire to a passive 'third Germany'; an object rather than autonomous actor in military and political affairs.

Within this, the period 1700–40 remains perhaps the most neglected.¹³ Usually, historians treat Prussia as an independent kingdom, either already from the acquisition of a royal title in 1700, or,

¹⁰ A good overview of this period is provided by Whaley, *Germany*, ii. 105–83.

¹¹ Relations to the Empire are missing from Wolfgang Neugebauer's general history, *Die Hohenzollern*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 2003). Karin Friedrich's *Brandenburg-Prussia, 1466–1806* (Basingstoke, 2012) is an important reappraisal of the Polish dimension to Prussian history, but unfortunately says little on its place in the Empire.

¹² As noted by Sven Externbrink, 'State-Building Within the Empire: The Cases of Brandenburg-Prussia and Savoy-Sardinia', in Evans and Wilson (eds.), *European Perspective*, 187–202, at 191.

¹³ The period before 1700 is discussed by Anton Schindling, 'Kurbrandenburg im System des Reiches während der zweiten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts', in Oswald Hauser (ed.), *Preußen, Europa und das Reich* (Cologne, 1987), 47–64. For post-1740 see Volker Press, 'Friedrich der Große als Reichspolitiker', in Heinz Duchhardt (ed.), *Friedrich der Große, Franken und das Reich* (Vienna, 1986), 25–56; Peter H. Wilson, 'Prussia's Relations with the Holy Roman Empire, 1740–86', *Historical Journal*, 51 (2008), 337–71; id., 'Frederick the Great and Imperial Politics, 1740–56', in Jürgen Luh and Michael Kaiser (eds.), *Friedrich 300: Eine perspektivische Bestandsaufnahme* (2009), online at <<http://www.perspectivia.net/content/publikationen/>>, accessed 17 Feb. 2014. A further review of the literature can be found in Frank Kleinhagenbrock, 'Brandenburg-Preußen und das Alte Reich ca.

more often, after 1713 when this title received wide (though incomplete) international recognition.¹⁴ That recognition coincided with the accession of Frederick William I (1713–40), the famous ‘soldier king’, whose deliberate ‘break in style’ ended preoccupation with what his son and successor, Frederick II (1740–86), disdainfully dismissed as ‘empty titles’, in favour of concentration on military and fiscal power.¹⁵ Prussia emerged as exemplar for the supposedly rational and modern process of state-building that Borussian historians argued was inevitably destined to supplant the Empire.¹⁶ Prussia’s relations with the Empire are treated as an extension of those with Habsburg Austria. The usual conclusion is that Frederick William, ‘after a short vacillation, pursued a completely pro-imperial policy’, fulfilling his obligations and not challenging the emperor.¹⁷ This acquiescence is explained by references to the king’s personality and to Austrian bribery of his ministers, rather than as a consequence of the strength of imperial institutions and political culture. Frederick William’s apparent timidity or (misguided) loyalty to the emperor has become a historical convention used to emphasize the more aggressive policies of Frederick II after 1740.

1650–1806’, in Wolfgang Neugebauer and Frank Kleinhagenbrock (eds.), *Handbuch der preußischen Geschichte*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 2009), i. 854–931.

¹⁴ The royal title was granted by Emperor Leopold I in November 1700, but many historians date it only from the lavish coronation in January 1701. It is customary to refer to the composite Hohenzollern state as Brandenburg-Prussia until the acquisition of the royal title, and Prussia thereafter. The crown treaty is printed in Theodor von Moerner (ed.), *Kurbrandenburgische Staatsverträge von 1601–1700* (Berlin, 1867; reprint 1965), no. 443. The most recent account of the crown’s acquisition is Frank Göse, *Friedrich I. (1657–1713): Ein König in Preußen* (Regensburg, 2012), 202–60.

¹⁵ The quotation comes from Frederick’s Political Testament of 1752; Otto Bardong (ed.), *Friedrich der Große* (Darmstadt, 1982), 228.

¹⁶ This view is deeply embedded in historical and political science studies of state formation and persists in more recent writing too: Wolf D. Gruner, ‘Preußen in Europa 1701–1860/71’, in Jürgen Luh, Vinzenz Czech, and Bert Becker (eds.), *Preussen, Deutschland und Europa* (Groningen, 2003), 429–460, at 438–9.

¹⁷ Peter Baumgart, ‘Friedrich Wilhelm I: Ein Soldatenkönig?’, in id., Bernhard R. Kroener, and Heinz Stübiger (eds.), *Die preußische Armee zwischen Ancien Régime und Reichsgründung* (Paderborn, 2008), 3–36, at 21. See also Walther

The period is also an important one in the Empire's history. The four decades after 1680 saw major changes in the Empire and its component territories. By doubling its territory between 1683 and 1718, Austria emerged as a European great power distinct from its possession of the imperial title. Several German dynasties, the Hohenzollerns included, acquired royal crowns associated with land outside the Empire. These families also emerged as 'armed princes', creating permanent armies which grew in size by 250 per cent between 1670 and 1710. Given the presence of so many powerful, ambitious political players, it is fair to ask what held the Empire together and prevented it from descending into warlordism like China after 1911.¹⁸

Beyond the intrinsic interest in reappraising Prusso-imperial relations, there is the more fundamental issue of Prussia as a test case for the culturalist approach to political history. Older views of Prussia as exemplary 'power state' have been deconstructed as part of the general rejection of monolithic models of absolutism.¹⁹ However, no one has yet characterized the Hohenzollern state as 'essentially fictive'; it remains 'real' to both conventional 'blood and iron' political history, as well as to studies of the lives of its inhabitants.²⁰ This 'real' actor cannot be ignored in any reappraisal of the Empire through the culturalist approach.

Space precludes discussion of what Prussian subjects thought of the Empire.²¹ It is nonetheless telling that Frederick II felt obliged to

Hubatsch, 'Preußen und das Reich', in Oswald Hauser (ed.), *Zur Problematik 'Preußen und das Reich'* (Cologne, 1984), 1–11.

¹⁸ For overviews of China's warlord period, see Bruce A. Elleman, *Modern Chinese Warfare, 1795–1989* (Abingdon, 2011), 149–77, and James E. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration: The Republican Era in Chinese History, 1912–1949* (New York, 1975). The pioneering study of Chinese warlordism by Ch'i Hsi-sheng stresses the significance of a shared political culture in holding the provincial warlords within a common national system, even at the height of internal conflict: *Warlord Politics in China 1916–1928* (Stanford, Calif., 1976), 179–95.

¹⁹ For this, see Peter H. Wilson, *Absolutism in Central Europe* (London, 2000).

²⁰ E.g. William W. Hagen's monumental study of agrarian relations clearly demonstrates how the Hohenzollern state affected relations between landowners and serfs: *Ordinary Prussians: Brandenburg Junkers and Villagers, 1500–1840* (Cambridge, 2002).

²¹ This topic has scarcely been investigated. Historians have routinely allowed a handful of noted intellectuals such as Kant or Hegel to speak for

prohibit the customary prayers for the emperor throughout his lands in 1750. It is clear that ordinary inhabitants across the Empire usually possessed at least minimal knowledge of the imperial constitution and could locate their community within it.²² This matched the Empire's character as a mixed monarchy in which power was distributed along a complex hierarchy of territories, allowing each to develop its own administration and identities. These arrangements were obviously very different from those in more centralized monarchies like England or France, but this did not make them any less 'real' for their inhabitants.²³

Rather than examining identity, this article will explore political behaviour. The first two sections will argue that the Empire's political culture was sustained by both formal institutions and established socio-political practices like dynasticism. The third part will explain how these patterns of behaviour were strained by the competition for royal titles amongst the prominent princes, including the Prussian Hohenzollerns. The final section will indicate that Prussia nonetheless continued to adhere to commonly accepted norms in its dealings with even the smallest imperial Estates after 1700.

Part I: Formal Frameworks for Interaction

By exploring the full extent of Prussia's constitutional position we can begin to see how deeply embedded it remained in the Empire

all Prussians on this topic. Important contributions to the debate on German identity include Georg Schmidt (ed.), *Die deutsche Nation im frühneuzeitlichen Europa* (Munich, 2010), and Len Scales, *The Shaping of German Identity: Authority and Crisis, 1254–1414* (Cambridge, 2012).

²² Ralf-Peter Fuchs, 'Kaiser und Reich im Spiegel von Untertanenbefragungen des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts', in Stephan Wendehorst and Siegrid Westphal (eds.), *Lesebuch altes Reich* (Munich, 2006), 48–52; Stefan Ehrenpreis et al., 'Probing the Legal History of the Jews in the Holy Roman Empire', *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts*, 2 (2003), 409–87, at 442–3, 483.

²³ For the strength of emotional attachment to the Empire, see Wolfgang Burgdorf, *Reichskonstitution und Nation: Verfassungsreformprojekte für das Heilige Römische Reich deutscher Nation im politischen Schrifttum von 1648 bis 1806* (Mainz, 1999); id., *Ein Weltbild verliert seine Welt: Der Untergang des Alten Reiches und die Generation 1806* (2nd edn. Munich, 2009); and Scales, *German Identity*.

despite its royal title. Certainly, Frederick I (1688–1713) and his successor Frederick William I emphasized their new status and tried to free their lands from some formal restrictions.²⁴ In this, however, they differed neither from their direct predecessors, nor their contemporaries in the Empire. Indeed, what is more surprising is how they remained engaged in all formal constitutional levels and institutions. The Hohenzollerns were as much lords of Ravenstein as they were newly minted kings in Prussia. They jealously guarded all their privileges, refusing to forgo even comparatively minor advantages and certainly doing very little to replace the complex, multi-layered relationship between their possessions and the Empire with a uniform pattern framed by monarchical sovereignty. Moreover, in retaining the advantages of existing relations, they accepted the price of remaining within established behaviour, and even in military matters, as we shall see, they avoided a breach with the Empire.

The imperial constitution exercised a powerful influence over the interaction between the numerous territories comprising the Empire. Fundamental to this constitution was the distribution of rights and privileges in a formal hierarchy which was never clearly nor logically related to material factors, like size of territory or population. The crucial division was the status of ‘immediacy’ under the emperor (*Reichsunmittelbarkeit*), distinguishing the rulers (usually called ‘princes’) of the Empire’s numerous component territories (called the ‘imperial Estates’, or *Reichsstände*), from the ‘mediate’ nobles and other subjects within those territories.²⁵ Those enjoying immediacy were themselves ranked in a hierarchy which had evolved since the thirteenth century into an increasingly complex and rigid structure. Various emperors exerted influence by adjusting this structure to favour loyal or compliant princes. Such alterations became increasingly difficult as the Empire developed more permanent institutions after 1480. By 1654 it was impossible for the emperor to make any significant change in the status of one prince without the agreement of the others, usually through the *Reichstag*.

²⁴ Frederick was known as Frederick III until his coronation as king in 1701. To avoid confusion, this article will identify him by his royal, rather than electoral number.

²⁵ The Empire’s structure is notoriously complex and full of anomalies. For a short introduction, see Peter H. Wilson, *The Holy Roman Empire 1495–1806* (2nd edn. Basingstoke, 2011).

While stabilizing the Empire, these changes frustrated individual princely ambition. The only way for a princely family to improve its status was to acquire more territory, bringing additional rights and privileges. It is important to note that, with a few exceptions, the German princes did not use force to do this, unlike the early twentieth-century Chinese warlords who employed their provincial armies to conquer territory and to compel the weak central government to shower them with promotions and new administrative titles.²⁶ Rather, German princes obtained additional land through dynastic inheritance or purchase. Acquisition required recognition from the emperor, whose assent was also necessary to legitimate normal transitions in hereditary rule. The arrangements underscore the feudal character of the Empire's constitutional hierarchy. By early modernity, emperors could not prevent sons following fathers in the hereditary principalities, but they could still delay formal enfeoffment, and thereby restrict the full exercise of territorial rights.²⁷ Moreover,

²⁶ It might be argued that the threat of intervention from other European powers rather than the potency of imperial political culture constrained the German princes from using force. Certainly, through the Peace of Westphalia Sweden and France acquired formal, though in practice relatively weak, powers to intervene to preserve the constitutional status quo. There were long periods, however, when their ability to intervene was curtailed by domestic or other foreign problems and it was only after 1763 that France, Russia, and other major powers became more equally committed to preserving the constitution as a means of preventing either Austria or Prussia from dominating the Empire: see Eckhard Buddruss, *Die französische Deutschlandpolitik 1756–1789* (Mainz, 1995). In China's case, the distraction of the Great Powers in the First World War was certainly a factor in the emergence of warlordism around 1916, but was outweighed by internal issues, notably the decentralization of financial and military authority in the late Qing era before 1911. Thereafter, Japan, Russia, and to a lesser extent other powers influenced events, but warlords were far from being the foreign puppets represented in western media of the 1920s. See e.g. O. Y. K. Wou, *Militarism in Modern China: The Career of Wu P'ei-Fu, 1916–39* (Canberra, 1978), 147–260; Gavan McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin in Northeast China, 1911–1928: China, Japan, and the Manchurian Idea* (Canberra, 1977), esp. 95–100.

²⁷ Jean-François Noël, 'Zur Geschichte der Reichsbelehnungen im 18. Jahrhundert', *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs*, 21 (1968), 106–22. For an interesting case of imperial feudal jurisdiction over Hohenzollern possessions see Tobias Schenk, 'Reichsgeschichte als Landesgeschichte', *Westfalen*, 90 (2012), 107–61, at 144–58.

inheritance disputes and other feudal matters were reserved to the *Reichshofrat* (Imperial Aulic Council), a court depending directly on the emperor, unlike the Empire's second supreme court, the *Reichskammergericht* (Imperial Cameral Court), where the emperor shared control with the imperial Estates and which adjudicated disputes between territories, and between their rulers and subjects.²⁸

Brandenburg-Prussia followed the general trend among larger principalities in securing incremental exemptions from the jurisdiction of both imperial courts. This process began in the mid fourteenth century, well before the Empire's judicial framework consolidated around 1500. Brandenburg was fully exempt from the *Reichskammergericht's* jurisdiction after 1586, while less complete rights were secured for the Hohenzollerns' other lands in 1702.

However, these privileges had to be negotiated afresh for each subsequent acquisition, and while they prevented Prussian subjects prosecuting their king in the imperial courts, they also required the monarchy to establish its own court of appeal. Imperial law did not apply directly, but Prussia remained within the Empire's legal culture, and its judiciary did not escape public comment, as Frederick II discovered in the furore generated by his intervention in the famous miller Arnold case.²⁹ Exemptions from imperial jurisdiction were useful, but their main significance to Prussian monarchs was as a way to match the privileges enjoyed by the Habsburgs.³⁰

As relatively powerful rulers, the Hohenzollerns enjoyed judicial autonomy beyond formal privileges. Prussia's first king, Frederick I, exploited the *Reichskammergericht's* breakdown between 1704 and 1711 to restrict appeals from those parts of his monarchy which

²⁸ Leopold Auer, 'The Role of the Imperial Aulic Council in the Constitutional Structure of the Holy Roman Empire', in Evans, Schaich, and Wilson (eds.), *Holy Roman Empire*, 63–75. For examples of intervention in territorial affairs by the *Reichshofrat*, see Siegrid Westphal, *Kaiserliche Rechtsprechung und herrschaftliche Stabilisierung: Reichsgerichtsbarkeit in den thüringischen Territorialstaaten 1648–1806* (Cologne, 2002).

²⁹ David M. Luebke, 'Frederick the Great and the Celebrated Case of the Miller Arnold (1770–1779)', *Central European History*, 32 (1999), 379–408.

³⁰ See Peter Rauscher, 'Recht und Politik: Reichsjustiz und oberstrichterliches Amt des Kaisers im Spannungsfeld des preußisch-österreichischen Dualismus (1740–1785)', *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs*, 46 (1998), 269–309, at 279–80.

lacked full exemption.³¹ His successor, Frederick William I, at one point faced forty cases in the *Reichshofrat*, including from nobles protesting against his tax policies. His angry efforts to hinder the court prompted Emperor Charles VI (1711–40) to accuse him of seeking a ‘statum in statu’ and severed diplomatic ties in 1721.³² A coincidence of interests in other areas improved relations by 1728 when the king promised to follow the Habsburg line in imperial institutions. He now switched to less confrontational methods, including bribing judges. However, neither he nor Prussia’s other eighteenth-century kings were inherently hostile to the courts, which were useful to legitimize Prussia’s own claims against others. Frederick I and Frederick William I consistently backed their own subjects involved in cases against other rulers, and Prussia was permanently represented in Wetzlar, where the *Reichskammergericht* was based. Frederick William’s ministers advised him in 1731 to abandon cooperation with other princes against the *Reichshofrat* because Prussia no longer had any complaints against it.³³

Representation in imperial institutions was another important indicator of status. Brandenburg qualified as an electorate for membership in the senior of the three ‘colleges’ in the *Reichstag*, and a privileged position in the various associated assemblies, or ‘deputations’.³⁴ The *Reichstag* was the Empire’s supreme legislative organ and took decisions binding on all imperial Estates, subject to the

³¹ He also repeatedly suspended his share of the regular financial contribution to the court’s maintenance. See Rudolf Smend, ‘Brandenburg-Preußen und das Reichskammergericht’, *Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preußischen Geschichte*, NF 20 (1907), 161–99, esp. 192; Sigrid Jahns, ‘Brandenburg-Preußen im System der Reichskammergerichts-Präsentationen 1648–1806’, in Hermann Weber (ed.), *Politische Ordnungen und soziale Kräfte im Alten Reich* (Wiesbaden, 1980), 169–202, at 179.

³² H. E. Feine, ‘Zur Verfassungsentwicklung des Heiligen Römischen Reiches seit dem Westfälischen Frieden’, *Zeitschrift der Savignystiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Germanistische Abteilung*, 52 (1932), 65–133, at 109. See also Michael Hughes, *Law and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Germany: The Imperial Aulic Council in the Reign of Charles VI* (Woodbridge, 1988), esp. 62 n 9.

³³ Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Dahlem, I HA, Rep. N, Nr. 303, Fasz. 92: Borcke and Podewils to Frederick William I, 20 June 1731, concerning the proposed renewal of the 1716 treaty with Württemberg.

³⁴ Anton Schindling, *Die Anfänge des immerwährenden Reichstags zu Regensburg* (Mainz, 1991).

emperor's approval. The electors were allowed to hold their own assemblies, but this privilege lost its relevance once the *Reichstag* remained permanently in session in Regensburg after 1663. Acquisition of a royal crown further eroded the utility of an electoral title for Brandenburg. This, indeed, was the crown's purpose, since the Hohenzollerns wanted to match their Saxon Wettin rivals, who had become kings of Poland in 1697. The subsequent elevation of the Hanoverian Guelphs to British royalty in 1714 further undermined the previously cherished electoral collegiality. All three Protestant electors now had crowns, while the two Catholic secular electors of Bavaria and the Palatinate had failed to obtain one, despite considerable expenditure of blood and treasure during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14). The three Catholic ecclesiastical electors of Mainz, Cologne, and Trier were ineligible because of their clerical status, and though the Catholic Habsburgs were represented in the electoral college through the kingdom of Bohemia, their parallel imperial status placed them in a very different category to their nominal colleagues.³⁵ Internal tensions and resentment at Prussia's growing power dissuaded the electors from backing the Hohenzollerns' proposed constitutional amendments intended to enhance Prussia's privileges in the Empire in 1711, and again in 1745.³⁶

Territorial acquisitions in 1648 and 1680 gave Prussia the largest block of votes in the *Reichstag's* second college, the college of princes, but it could not dominate debates there because the range of members and interests was even greater than in the electoral college.³⁷

³⁵ There were further tensions over Hanover's elevation to electoral status, which had only been fully accepted in 1708, as well as a long-running dispute between Bavaria and the Palatinate over their relative ranking within the electoral college. For these and the development of the college generally in this period, see Axel Gotthard, *Säulen des Reiches: Die Kurfürsten im frühneuzeitlichen Reichsverband*, 2 vols. (Husum, 1999). The relative decline of electoral status for Prussia did not diminish its attraction for other princes further down the imperial hierarchy: see Ludolf Pelizaeus, *Der Aufstieg Württembergs und Hessens zur Kurwürde 1692–1803* (Frankfurt am Main, 2000).

³⁶ Gerd Kleinheyer, *Die kaiserlichen Wahlkapitulationen* (Karlsruhe, 1968), 109–10.

³⁷ These acquisitions were part of the Westphalian settlement ending the Thirty Years War. See Peter Baumgart, 'Kurbrandenburgs Kongreßdiplomatie und ihre Ergebnisse', in Heinz Duchhardt (ed.), *Der Westfälische Friede*

Other possessions acquired in 1609 raised the prospect of a share in the collective vote awarded to the Westphalian counts in 1654.³⁸ This claim was not pressed until 1705, indicating that Prussia's elevation to royalty did not end interest in the Empire. On the contrary, acquisition of parts of the Orange inheritance in Westphalia in 1702 intensified efforts to assert Prussia's status relative to comparatively minor imperial Estates. The Westphalian counts strongly opposed Prussian claims, regarding the Hohenzollerns as powerful outsiders whose admission into their association would wreck its utility as a vehicle for their own interests. It was not until 1732 that the counts grudgingly accepted that the Hohenzollerns could share their collective vote, but only on behalf of the county of Tecklenburg which Prussia had acquired in 1707.³⁹

Prussia's representation in the Empire's regional framework of ten *Kreise* (imperial circles) was also contested. The territorial gains of 1609/48 gave the Hohenzollerns votes in the Westphalian and Lower Saxon *Kreise*, in addition to that enjoyed by Brandenburg in the Upper Saxon *Kreis*. The *Kreise* were interposed between the imperial Estates and 'national' institutions like the *Reichstag* to coordinate regional action. Each *Kreis* had a coordinating directory, held by between one and three local princes, balanced by an assembly of all those with qualifying territory. Representation of imperial Estates in the *Kreis* assemblies was much broader than in the *Reichstag* with, for instance, the counts and prelates enjoying full votes.⁴⁰ Reform of the

(Munich, 1998), 349–59. The Hohenzollerns obtained full votes in the college of princes for Eastern Pomerania and the secularized ecclesiastical principalities of Halberstadt, Cammin, and Minden in 1648, plus another for the former archbishopric of Magdeburg in 1680. It should be remembered that Prussia itself lay outside the Empire and had no formal rights within it.

³⁸ The Hohenzollerns acquired Cleves, Mark, and Ravensberg as part of the disputed Jülich-Cleves inheritance in 1609. The Empire's 90 or so secular and ecclesiastical principalities each had full votes, but the 140 or so prelates and counts had to share six collective votes, the final one of which was agreed in 1654.

³⁹ Johannes Arndt, *Das Niederrheinisch-Westfälische Reichsgrafenkollegium und seine Mitglieder* (1653–1806) (Mainz, 1991), esp. 22–4.

⁴⁰ Several relatively large imperial Estates, such as the Hohenzollern possessions of Mark and Cleves, were represented at *Kreis* level, but not in the *Reichstag*. The *Kreis* structure was established in 1500–12, but in most cases

Empire's mechanisms for collective security in 1681–2 enhanced the *Kreise's* significance, but affected each differently depending on their composition. *Kreis* institutions offered larger principalities the chance to dictate the affairs of their weaker neighbours, but also raised the prospect of those smaller territories exerting influence through collective action. The balance between large and small imperial Estates in each *Kreis* generally determined which path was followed.

In Prussia's case, any prospect that it might subvert the Upper Saxon *Kreis* for its own ends was blocked by Saxony which held the regional initiative as *Kreis* Director and its web of unequal treaties with the smaller members. Prior to 1697, Brandenburg policy was one of obstruction, intended to prevent Saxony from using the formal structure to dictate regional policy. The conversion of the Saxon elector to Catholicism in 1697—to assist his election as Polish king—allowed Brandenburg to mobilize the weaker Protestant members in a bid to seize the formal directory of the Upper Saxon *Kreis*. The Hohenzollerns backed the emperor's request that the *Kreis* mobilize troops in the War of the Spanish Succession, turning the tables on Saxony, which refused to cooperate because it needed its own troops in Poland. Saxony nonetheless retained the directory, forcing Prussia to resume its previous obstruction by 1718.⁴¹ The episode shows that Prussia's relations to the Empire were determined by far more complex factors than purely its relationship to Austria.

Acquisition of Magdeburg in 1680 gave Brandenburg a share in the Lower Saxon *Kreis* directory, but all efforts to use this were blocked by resolute Hanoverian opposition.⁴² By contrast, the absence of a single local rival created more opportunities in Westphalia, where Hohenzollern possession of Cleves and Mark brought a share in the directory with the Palatinate and the bishop of Münster.⁴³ Brandenburg and the Palatinate were regarded locally as

was only fully effective after the mid sixteenth century. See Winfried Dotzauer, *Die deutschen Reichskreise (1383–1806)* (Stuttgart, 1998).

⁴¹ Thomas Nicklas, *Macht oder Recht? Frühneuzeitliche Politik im obersächsischen Reichskreis* (Stuttgart, 2002), 315–30.

⁴² Georg Schnath, *Geschichte Hannovers im Zeitalter der neunten Kur und der englischen Sukzession 1674–1714*, 5 vols. (Hildesheim, 1938–82), ii. 292–3, iii. 548–9.

⁴³ For the details see Alwin Hanschmidt, 'Kurbrandenburg als Kreisstand im Niederrheinisch-Westfälischen Kreis vom Westfälischen Frieden bis zum

outsiders whose core territories and interests lay elsewhere. Their Westphalian possessions were scattered and vulnerable, given their proximity to the Netherlands, which formed the principal battleground of most major western European wars. Though fairly small, the Westphalian possessions were comparatively densely populated and valuable in fiscal terms. Both Brandenburg and the Palatinate came to see the *Kreis* structure as a convenient framework to manage their Westphalian interests, particularly once they patched up their long-standing dispute over conflicting territorial claims in the 1670s. Nonetheless, as will become more apparent below, local opposition continued to thwart Prussia's ambitions in the region.

The recent culturalist approach has shifted attention beyond these formal institutional structures to examine the behaviour of those who composed and interacted with them. One of the most important findings has been to identify the growing importance of written culture in early modernity. This spread rapidly during the fifteenth century and assisted the consolidation of the Empire's constitution around 1500. The constitutional and legal frameworks were never codified, but they became objects of professional study, known as *Reichspublizistik*, while imperial institutions and princely governments generated mountains of paper records. Written culture evolved to assist the established use of precedent in determining political legitimacy. As the religious reformers discovered during the Reformation, writing things down could make differences clearer and hinder consensus. Nonetheless, written agreements were thought to reduce disputes and thereby remove the friction inhibiting collective action within the Empire's large and complex framework.⁴⁴

Spanischen Erbfolgekrieg', in Hauser (ed.), *Preußen, Europa*, 47–64. Palatine rights rested on the duchies of Jülich and Berg, which were ruled by the separate Pfalz-Neuburg line from 1609. This branch acquired the Palatinate itself in 1685.

⁴⁴ My argument here follows Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger's analysis in her *Kaisers alte Kleider*. For the development of a 'public sphere' in the Empire, see Wolfgang Behringer, 'Core and Periphery: The Holy Roman Empire as a Communications Universe', in Evans, Schaich, and Wilson (eds.), *The Holy Roman Empire*, 347–58; Susanne Friedrich, *Drehscheibe Regensburg: Das Informations- und Kommunikationssystem des Immerwährenden Reichstags um 1700* (Berlin, 2007).

The ambiguities of written culture are amply demonstrated through a brief analysis of Prussia's military policy, which concludes our survey of its place in the imperial constitutional order. First, attempts to compel powerful imperial Estates like Brandenburg to contribute their share of defence by fixing their responsibilities in formal agreements had unintentionally produced complex military arrangements that allowed the powerful to dodge their own obligations whilst bullying the weak into contributing more. Yet, Prussia's broad adherence to constitutional norms confounds expectations. This, I will argue, is less corroboration for claims for the strength of the formal constitutional structure than for the significance of the Empire's political culture.

Prussia's rise as a military power is well known; its army grew by over 400 per cent between 1670 and 1740, compared to the overall increase in troop numbers across the Empire of 107 per cent in the same period.⁴⁵ By 1700 Prussia already had the second largest army in the Empire after Austria. However, it did not use its troops to pursue objectives directly by force, unlike Saxony, which was a full belligerent in the Great Northern War (1700–21), or Bavaria, which joined France in opposing the Empire in the War of the Spanish Succession.⁴⁶ Prussia hired large numbers of troops to Britain and the Dutch Republic in return for political backing and recognition of its royal title. Providing auxiliaries to foreign powers was scarcely unusual, nor contrary to imperial law or interests, since these forces were fighting the French.⁴⁷ Moreover, Prussia took care to be seen to fulfil its parallel obligations to the Empire.

⁴⁵ Prussia's relative increase is even more marked if the total of 99,446 soldiers from December 1740 is used, rather than the 76,278 men Frederick II found on his accession seven months earlier. For a more detailed breakdown of the growth in German army size, see the tables in Peter H. Wilson, *From Reich to Revolution: German History, 1558–1806* (Basingstoke, 2004), 226–7.

⁴⁶ Cologne and Mantua also opposed the Empire, while Gotha and Brunswick were disarmed before they could act. Prussia did join the Great Northern War briefly in 1715.

⁴⁷ Prussian policy in this period is summarized by Linda and Marsha Frey, *Frederick I: The Man and His Times* (Boulder, Col., 1984), 184–243. See also Klaus-Ludwig Feckl, *Preußen im Spanischen Erbfolgekrieg* (Frankfurt am Main, 1979). For general German practice, see Peter H. Wilson, *German Armies: War and German Politics 1648–1806* (London, 1998), 101–49.

Imperial collective security required each imperial Estate to contribute soldiers to the common imperial army (*Reichsarmee*) according to quotas agreed by the *Reichstag* and *Kreis* assemblies. Prussia was supposed to provide troops to the collective forces of each of the *Kreise* where it held territory. However, it was far from clear exactly how many men should be sent, since each *Kreis* adjusted its own quotas, often without full approval from the *Reichstag*. It was also possible for imperial Estates to substitute additional infantry for the more expensive cavalry, or vice versa. Several *Kreise* also used their constitutional right to mobilize additional collective forces, such as Westphalia which sent units to protect the imperial city of Cologne in 1702.⁴⁸ Finally, important rulers like the Hohenzollerns were also providing additional regiments as auxiliaries to the emperor or his allies.

Prussia exploited the inevitable confusion, at times temporarily designating auxiliary or other troops as contingents with the imperial or *Kreis* forces.⁴⁹ The aim was to harmonize military deployment with political goals, rather than simply dodge imperial obligations. Like its rivals among the more important principalities, Prussia wanted to keep its troops together under its own generals. A prince represented at the front by a large, consolidated body of troops was visibly more important than one whose units were dispersed in obscure garrisons. He could also influence coalition policies and possibly extract additional political concessions by threatening to withdraw his force, or withhold it for an entire campaign, as in 1708, when the elector Palatine put pressure on the emperor.⁵⁰ These methods were difficult to use successfully. The Empire and its components were locked into a grand European coalition fighting France in

⁴⁸ Landesarchiv Münster (hereafter LAM), A101, Nr. 7: City of Cologne to the bishop of Münster, 12 Dec. 1701.

⁴⁹ Details in Curt von Jany, *Geschichte der preußischen Armee vom 15. Jahrhundert bis 1914*, 4 vols. (Osnabrück, 1967), i. 432–528. Other major territories did the same, e.g. the Palatinate: Oskar Bezzel, *Geschichte des Kurpfälzischen Heeres*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1928), ii. 64–173.

⁵⁰ Details in Georg Wilhelm Sante, 'Die Kurpfälzische Politik des Kurfürsten Johann Wilhelm vornehmlich im spanischen Erbfolgekrieg, 1690–1716', *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 44 (1924), 19–64; Charles Ingrao, *In Quest and Crisis: Emperor Joseph I and the Habsburg Monarchy* (West Lafayette, Ind., 1979), 14, 72–4.

the Netherlands, Rhineland, Italy, and Spain. Non-cooperation risked alienating the other allies and could provide excuses for the emperor to deny the very concessions that a prince sought. Like the British and Dutch, the emperor deliberately structured his agreements with German princes to keep their contingents dispersed and used the Empire's regionally organized defence system to assist in this.⁵¹

Prussia met most of its obligations to the Empire by hiring troops from other, less powerful princes, to create greater flexibility in the deployment of its own forces. This practice of subcontracting also enhanced Prussia's influence as a patron of weaker princes. Gotha, for example, contracted to provide 2,400 men to substitute for part of Prussia's contingent after 1702. In addition to paying for the troops, Prussia won influence in Gotha through brokering an imperial pardon for that principality's previous pro-French stance.⁵² Frederick William I planned to continue this practice after 1713 should Prussia be required to provide troops to the Empire again. He included promises to hire the necessary men in his treaties with Württemberg which were signed as part of wider efforts to extend influence into southern Germany.⁵³ These arrangements were ignored when the Empire mobilized during the War of the Polish Succession (1733–5), because Emperor Charles VI allowed Prussia to send its own troops

⁵¹ For Frederick I's failure to consolidate his forces into a single command, see Arnold Berney, *König Friedrich I. und das Haus Habsburg (1701–1707)* (Munich, 1927), 54–5, 73–4, 120–1. This situation was bemoaned in the older, nationalist historiography which condemned the Empire for keeping Germany weak. For instance, Max Braubach described Frederick's subsidy agreements as reducing Prussia to 'vassalage': *Die Bedeutung der Subsidien für die Politik im spanischen Erbfolgekrieg* (Bonn, 1923), 106–7.

⁵² The agreements are printed in Viktor Loewe (ed.), *Preußens Staatsverträge aus der Regierungszeit König Friedrichs I.* (Leipzig, 1923), 19–22. See also Hans Patze and Walter Schlesinger (eds.), *Geschichte Thüringens*, vol. v: *Politische Geschichte der Neuzeit* (Cologne, 1982), 408. For the attractions and pitfalls of subcontracting for the weaker partner, see Peter H. Wilson, 'The Holy Roman Empire and the Problem of the Armed Estates', in Peter Rauscher (ed.), *Kriegführung und Staatsfinanzen: Die Habsburgermonarchie und das Heilige Römische Reich vom Dreißigjährigen Krieg bis zum Ende des habsburgischen Kaisertums 1740* (Münster, 2010), 487–514, at 505–7.

⁵³ Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart (hereafter HSAS), A202, Bü.1206: treaties of 18 Dec. 1716 and 17 Sept. 1731.

as a single, consolidated contingent in 1735.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, Frederick II renewed the arrangement with Württemberg in 1744 and intended hiring soldiers from smaller principalities should Prussia ever be obliged to contribute in a future war.⁵⁵

Fulfilment of obligations to the Empire and foreign powers required Prussian troops to march across land belonging to other imperial Estates. This was necessary even in peacetime, as units changed garrison between Prussia's own possessions, especially the isolated enclaves in Westphalia. Troop movements became a serious problem during the Thirty Years War, when soldiers frequently took what they needed. One minor prince described the imperial army behaving as if his land was 'a self-service inn'.⁵⁶ A primary motive behind imperial defence reform in 1681–2 was to ensure that powerful 'armed princes' did not exploit the resources of their unarmed neighbours. Imperial legislation required each imperial Estate to notify others in advance of troop movements. Soldiers had to keep to prescribed routes and to pay for accommodation, food, and transport, with those failing to follow the rules liable for punishment.

Prussia adhered quite closely to these requirements. For example, the necessary notifications (*Requisitoriales*) were sent to the relevant Westphalian territories in both the wars of Spanish and Polish Succession.⁵⁷ Transit imposed a considerable burden on minor territories. Nearly 22,000 Prussians passed through the county of Rietberg, equivalent to three times its population, during the War of the

⁵⁴ Jany, *Preußische Armee*, i. 664–77. However, this failed to achieve the political concessions Frederick William I desired.

⁵⁵ HSAS, A202, Bü.1206: treaty of 31 Jan. 1744. It should be remembered that the Württemberg treaty was concluded whilst Prussia was allied to the Wittelsbach Emperor Charles VII and the prospect of mobilizing the imperial army was not wholly unrealistic. For the idea of hiring contingents later, see Frederick II's Political Testament of 1752, in Bardong (ed.), *Friedrich der Große*, 223.

⁵⁶ For these problems see Peter H. Wilson, *Europe's Tragedy: The Thirty Years War* (London, 2009), 399–407 (quotation from 406).

⁵⁷ LAM, A295 Nr. 264 notifying the abbot of Corvey during the War of the Spanish Succession, and A230 Nr. 77, 18 Nov. 1734: general notification of the imminent transit of the 10,000 strong contingent in the Polish Succession War.

Spanish Succession.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, Prussia notified the Rietberg authorities and refunded much of the cost, unlike the Austrians and Saxons, who failed to pay anything.⁵⁹

Part II: *Informal Frameworks for Interaction*

Established social practices, like dynasticism, supplemented the Empire's institutions in shaping political culture. Dynasticism was strongly influenced by the Empire's hierarchical structure, which determined the status of princely families. All families played the same game, seeking advantageous marriages to continue their lineage, establish claims to additional territory, and, ideally, enhance their status through kinship with a more prestigious partner.

The Hohenzollerns were no exception, but they were relatively unsuccessful compared to their better-connected rivals in Saxony, Bavaria, and Hanover. Unlike even some comparatively minor families, like the Brunswick Guelphs, the Hohenzollerns had never provided a medieval German king or emperor. Their electorate of Brandenburg was a political backwater in the sixteenth century, while their family's status was only marginally improved through the inheritance of the duchy of Prussia, outside the Empire, from a junior branch in 1618. Desire to safeguard Prussia influenced the dynastic marriage with King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden in 1620, but apart from the 'Great Elector' Frederick William's (1640–88) marriage with a princess from the Dutch House of Orange in 1646, the Brandenburg Hohenzollerns were usually reduced to marrying their Franconian relations in Ansbach and Bayreuth, or their own junior branch of Brandenburg-Schwedt.⁶⁰ Other marriages were contracted

⁵⁸ LAM, A250 III Akten Nr. 180. A further 1,612 passed through in 1715–16 during movements associated with Prussia's involvement in the Great Northern War, with another 1,325 in changes of garrison in 1720 and 1723.

⁵⁹ Prussian notifications in LAM, A250 III Akten Nr. 181 and 185. The numbers of troops are recorded in Nr. 180 with payments in Nr. 187.

⁶⁰ The Swedish match is covered by Veronica Buckley, *Christina Queen of Sweden* (London, 2004), 12–25, 54–64, 81–4. See also Ulrike Hammer, *Kurfürstin Luise Henriette: Eine Oranierin als Mittlerin zwischen den Niederlanden und Brandenburg-Preußen* (Münster, 2001). The importance of dynasticism to the Hohenzollerns' self-perception is emphasized by Volker Wittenauer, *Im*

with neighbouring families, notably in Pomerania (before 1637) and Mecklenburg, to forge inheritance claims should their indigenous rulers die out. Both Frederick I and Frederick William I married Hanoverian princesses, partly to foster friendship with this powerful neighbour. After Prusso-Hanoverian relations hit a low point, Prussia switched to Hanover's local rival, Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel in 1732.⁶¹

Prussia also used dynastic marriages to extend influence into parts of the Empire where it lacked territory. The junior Brandenburg-Schwedt branch provided a convenient 'reserve' of relations who could be married into second-rank princely families. Henrietta Maria of Brandenburg-Schwedt was married to the Württemberg crown prince in 1716 to consolidate the renewal of Prussia's alliance from 1709. Württemberg firmly remained the junior partner, and Henrietta Maria was obliged by Frederick William I to renounce her claims to Hohenzollern territory.⁶²

The Schwedt family held land in Brandenburg, but without the status of imperial immediacy. Their attractiveness as marriage partners stemmed solely from their relationship to the Hohenzollern main line. Prussia contained few other nobles who could be employed in a similar manner to advance interests across the Empire. Only the Burgraves of Dohna were recognized as immediate, though none of their extensive possessions in Prussia, Bohemia, Lusatia, and Silesia qualified for representation in the *Reichstag*.⁶³ Their immedia-

Dienste der Macht: Kultur und Sprache am Hof der Hohenzollern vom Großen Kurfürst bis zu Wilhelm II. (Paderborn, 2007). The Brandenburg-Schwedt line stemmed from the Great Elector's second marriage and lasted from 1688 to 1789.

⁶¹ The treaty is printed in Loewe (ed.), *Preußens Staatsverträge Friedrichs I.*, 417–32. The agreement was sealed by the marriage of the future Frederick II to a Brunswick princess. For this and the other marriages, see Karin Feuerstein-Praßer, *Die preußischen Königinnen* (Munich, 2003). Prusso-Hanoverian tension is covered by Heinrich Schilling, *Der Zwist Preußens und Hannovers 1729/1730* (Halle, 1912).

⁶² HSAS, G219, Bü.1–4. For the 1709 alliance, see Loewe (ed.), *Preußens Staatsverträge Friedrichs I.*, 105–7.

⁶³ Volker Press, 'Das Haus Dohna in der europäischen Adelsgesellschaft des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts', in Andreas Mehl and Wolfgang Christian Schneider (eds.), *Reformatio et Reformationes: Festschrift für Lothar Graf zu Dohna* (Darmstadt, 1989), 371–402.

cy made them acceptable partners to the status-conscious imperial counts whom Prussia was keen to cultivate in the later seventeenth century. Prussia encouraged marriages between the Dohna and comital families like the Solms, Wied, and Wittgenstein who were active in the regional politics of Westphalia and the Rhineland.

However, the Hohenzollerns were unable to attract counts or princes to their court. Georg Friedrich of Waldeck stands out in the court of the Great Elector not only through his ability as a statesman, but as one of the very few imperial nobles who moved to Berlin.⁶⁴ Even Frederick I's lavish court was only adorned by two imperial counts: Kolbe von Wartenberg and August von Sayn-Wittgenstein. Polish recognition of Prussian independence allowed the elector of Brandenburg to ennoble in his capacity as sovereign duke of Prussia after 1660, but such titles lacked prestige or full recognition in the Empire because the duchy of Prussia was beyond the imperial frontier. The Hohenzollerns began ennobling in their other lands after 1675, but Frederick I was obliged to void all these new titles in 1700 as one of his many concessions to the emperor to secure his royal crown. Elevation to royalty allowed Frederick to grant higher titles and the first Prussian counts were created at his coronation on 18 January 1701. However, even these still lacked the status of imperial nobility. Meanwhile, the *Reichshofrat* received a flood of petitions from Hohenzollern subjects seeking imperial recognition for titles awarded since 1675, but which were now exposed as illegitimate. Frederick William I again ignored the formal hierarchy and created his own nobles after 1713, but these still lacked full legitimacy until Frederick II secured imperial recognition of Prussian titles throughout the Empire in 1742.⁶⁵

Prussia remained less attractive than the Habsburg monarchy, which contained numerous wealthy families who had acquired the status of personal immediacy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁶⁶ Not only were these families acceptable partners for imperial counts and minor princes, but their desire to consolidate

⁶⁴ Gerhard Menk, *Georg Friedrich von Waldeck 1620–1692* (Arolsen, 1992).

⁶⁵ Tobias Schenk, 'Das Alte Reich in der Mark Brandenburg', *Jahrbuch für brandenburgische Landesgeschichte*, 63 (2012), 19–72, at 60–1.

⁶⁶ See Petr Mat'a, 'Bohemia, Silesia and the Empire: Negotiating Princely Dignity on the Eastern Periphery', in Evans and Wilson (eds.), *European Perspective*, 143–65.

their own status encouraged them to seek such marriages. A good example is the Kaunitz family which climbed from the ranks of Bohemian knights by acquiring the county of Rietberg through marriage in 1699, obtaining first Rietberg's share in the Westphalian counts' collective vote in the *Reichstag*, then elevation to the personal status of imperial prince (1764), and finally a full princely vote (1803).⁶⁷ The Habsburgs promoted these marriages, along with appointments in their larger, more extensive court, army, and administration, as ways of extending influence throughout the Empire.⁶⁸ Prussia could not compete, despite its new royal title. Its court and administration remained staffed primarily by its own nobility. Even in the army, the proportion of German nobles serving as colonels or generals was only 22 per cent across 1650–1730, and most of these were barons or untitled nobles.⁶⁹ Prussia remained the least transnational of the German monarchies formed by 'personal unions' (discussed below), with no major immigrant group joining its elite after the influx of Huguenot refugees in the 1680s.

Prussia was also constrained by the religious dimension to imperial politics. Officially, the Empire had three legal faiths: Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism. Supervision of religious observance, clergy, and churches had all been devolved to the imperial Estates under powers known as the 'right of Reformation' (*ius Reformandi*). The Peace of Westphalia curtailed these powers by fixing the confes-

⁶⁷ Alwin Hanschmidt, 'Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz-Rietberg als Landesherr der Grafschaft Rietberg 1746–1794', in Grete Klingenstein and Franz A. J. Szabo (eds.), *Staatskanzler Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz-Rietberg 1711–1794* (Graz, 1996), 416–40; G. J. Rosenkranz, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Landes Rietberg und seiner Grafen 1075–1807* (Münster, 1853), 89–108.

⁶⁸ Volker Press, 'The Habsburg Court as Center of the Imperial Government', *Journal of Modern History*, 58, supplement (1986), 23–45, and id., 'Patronat und Klientel im Heiligen Römischen Reich', in Antoni Maczak (ed.), *Klientel-systeme im Europa der frühen Neuzeit* (Munich, 1988), 19–46.

⁶⁹ Peter-Michael Hahn, 'Aristokratisierung und Professionalisierung: Der Aufstieg der Obristen zu einer militärischen und höfischen Elite in Brandenburg-Preußen von 1650–1720', *Forschungen zur brandenburgisch und preußischen Geschichte*, NF 1 (1991), 161–208; Peter Bahl, 'Die Berlin-Potsdamer Hofgesellschaft unter dem Großen Kurfürsten und König Friedrich I', in Frank Göse (ed.), *Im Schatten der Krone: Die Mark Brandenburg um 1700* (Potsdam, 2003), 31–98; Arndt, *Niederrheinisch-Westfälische Reichsgrafenkollegium*, 307–12.

sional character of each imperial Estate as it had been in 1624. Rulers were no longer able to compel their subjects to change faith, while minorities were given legal protection. The adjustment was intended to stabilize the constitutional balance between Catholics and Protestants. In the longer term, this worked well, channelling religious conflict into less fundamental disputes over legal rights and jurisdictions which could be settled in the imperial courts.⁷⁰ Rulers were relatively free to go beyond the constitutional minimum and extend toleration to other groups, and the Hohenzollerns were among the most prominent rulers who did this, largely to attract immigrants and repopulate their lands after the Thirty Years War.⁷¹

However, the religious dimension of political behaviour remained circumscribed. Ruling families were expected to keep the faith of their forefathers. This restricted the choice of marriage partners to co-religionists; something which further reduced the Hohenzollerns' options. Though their conversion to Calvinism in 1613 did not preclude later marriages to Lutherans, it ruled out Catholics, including foreign Catholic royalty. Prussia acquired three former church lands through the Peace of Westphalia, but this treaty prohibited further secularization, while, as Protestants, the Hohenzollerns were personally ineligible for positions in the still Catholic imperial church. Though individually small, the church lands collectively comprised about a seventh of the Empire and exercised 39 of the 110 electoral and princely votes in the *Reichstag*.⁷² The Bavarian

⁷⁰ Ralf-Peter Fuchs, *Ein 'Medium zum Frieden': Die Normaljahrsregel und die Beendigung des Dreißigjährigen Krieges* (Munich, 2011). For this and the debate on its effectiveness, see the summary in Wilson, *Europe's Tragedy*, 758–69.

⁷¹ Useful summary of Hohenzollern toleration in Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia 1600–1947* (London, 2006), 122–4, 139–44. For the general situation, see Joachim Whaley, 'A Tolerant Society? Religious Toleration in the Holy Roman Empire, 1648–1806', in Ole Peter Grell and Roy Porter (eds.), *Toleration in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge, 2000), 175–95.

⁷² There were 3 ecclesiastical electors and 34 princely votes held by the archbishops, bishops, and prelates in 1708. With 3 secular electoral and 22 princely votes, the Catholics had 62 votes in these 2 colleges, to the Protestants' 3 electoral and 44 princely votes. There were 13 Catholic and 32 Protestant imperial cities, plus 5 bi-confessional cities. In addition, the bishopric of Osnabrück alternated between Protestant princes and Catholic bishops.

and Palatine Wittelsbachs extended their influence by promoting their younger sons as ecclesiastical princes.⁷³

Rather than losing interest in confessional politics, or simply ignoring the constraints, however, Prussia conformed to the general pattern within the Empire of seeking advantage through its formal religious rights and influence through less formal structures. Prussia had little to gain from pursuing the politics of religious radicalism which, in any case, had been discredited by the Thirty Years War. The Peace of Westphalia addressed Protestant concerns at the in-built Catholic majority through an arrangement known as *itio in partes*. This allowed the *Reichstag* to reconvene in two confessional blocks, or *corpora* (*corpus Catholicorum* and *corpus Evangelicorum*), rather than the three hierarchical colleges where the Protestants could be outvoted.⁷⁴ The Catholics never used this option, but even many Protestants were lukewarm, distrusting 'parties in the commonwealth' (*partes in republica*) as divisive and to be avoided after the horrors of civil war.⁷⁵ Despite its continued significance for individuals, religion did not override concern for status or political ambition, both of which repeatedly encouraged cross-confessional cooperation and prevented the Empire polarizing exclusively over faith.⁷⁶ Defence of religion had become part of each imperial Estate's concern for its status and privileges. Saxony, for example, only accepted leadership of the *corpus Evangelicorum* in 1653 because refusal would alienate the numerous weaker imperial Estates who traditionally looked to it to defend

⁷³ Klaus Jaitner, 'Reichskirchenpolitik und Rombeziehungen Philipp Wilhelms von Pfalz-Neuburg von 1662 bis 1690', *Annalen des historischen Vereins für den Niederrhein*, 178 (1976), 91–144; Rudolf Reinhardt, 'Zur Reichskirchenpolitik der Pfalz-Neuburger Dynastie', *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 84 (1964), 118–28.

⁷⁴ Klaus Schlaich, 'Majoritas—protestatio—itio in partes—corpus evangelicorum', *Zeitschrift der Savignystiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Kanonistische Abteilung*, 107 (1977), 264–99, 108 (1978), 139–79.

⁷⁵ Id., 'Corpus Evangelicorum und Corpus Catholicorum', *Der Staat*, 11 (1972), 218–30, at 226–8.

⁷⁶ Despite the recent trend to emphasize the importance of religion after 1648: Dieter Stievermann, 'Politik und Konfession im 18. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung*, 18 (1991), 177–99. See, more generally, Jürgen Luh, *Unheiliges Römisches Reich: Der konfessionelle Gegensatz 1648 bis 1806* (Potsdam, 1995).

their religious rights. In addition, the newly formed corpus immediately adopted the existing status hierarchy whereby each representative spoke in the same strict sequence determined by the fixed seating arrangements in the *Reichstag*.⁷⁷

In political terms, however, the corpus had little practical power. The permanence of the *Reichstag* after 1663 removed the need for a Protestant right of self-assembly, since their envoys could easily confer in Regensburg. Their corpus was only empowered to discuss 'religious issues' and most observers, Protestants included, believed it had no authority to act unilaterally, and that all disputes should be referred to the imperial courts. Yet the corpus remained more than simply a forum to assert status, as suggested by one culturalist analysis.⁷⁸ Its significance was revealed when Prussia challenged Saxony for control of the corpus's directory following the conversion of Elector Augustus the Strong (1694–1733) to Catholicism in 1697. The elector's conversion was intended to advance his bid for the Polish crown, but occurred during heightened tension over the Catholic elector Palatine's disregard for the rights of his Protestant subjects.⁷⁹ Augustus realized that losing the directory would cost Saxony prestige in the Empire and risk alienating Protestant powers, like England and the Dutch Republic, whose support was necessary for his Polish ambitions.⁸⁰

Keen to avoid being eclipsed by Saxony's acquisition of the Polish crown, Prussia saw control of the directory as a way of undermining Saxony within the Empire and, possibly, displacing it as spokesman for the smaller north German Protestant principalities. The prospects appeared promising, because the succession of a Catholic line in the

⁷⁷ Andreas Kalipke, 'The *corpus evangelicorum*: A Culturalist Perspective on its Procedure in the Eighteenth-Century Holy Roman Empire', in Coy, Marschke, and Sabean (eds.), *Holy Roman Empire*, 229–47, at 236–7.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 239.

⁷⁹ For the background see Meinrad Schaab, 'Die Wiederherstellung des Katholizismus in der Kurpfalz im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für Geschichte des Oberrheins*, 114 (1966), 147–205. For Augustus's conversion, see Tony Sharp, *Pleasure and Ambition: The Life, Loves and Wars of Augustus the Strong* (London, 2001), 137–40.

⁸⁰ Jochen Vötsch, *Kursachsen, das Reich und der mitteldeutsche Raum zu Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main, 2003), 49–161. For the following see also Aretin, *Altes Reich*, ii. 272–95.

Palatinate in 1685 had removed this electorate from the ranks of leading Protestant imperial Estates, leaving only the new Hanoverian elector as a realistic rival to Prussia's bid.⁸¹ However, the outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession obliged Prussia to moderate its criticism to avoid appearing partisan at a time of common danger. Prussia rallied Protestant support by adopting the Palatinate's former programme of religious parity in imperial institutions, but then compromised in March 1704, when this programme risked alienating the emperor and Catholics. Prussia secured parity in appointments to the imperial general staff in return for persuading the Protestants to drop this demand for other institutions.⁸² The arrangements required equal numbers of Protestant and Catholic generals in each rank. Since this practice was adopted by several *Kreise* for their own staffs, Prussia was able to extend its influence by cooperating with smaller Protestant princes to fill the new positions.⁸³ Nonetheless, the controversy about the directory tainted the practice of *itio in partes*, discouraging its use until 1727; an experiment only repeated three times during the eighteenth century.

Prussia's ambition for the directory was not helped either by Frederick I's resolution of the Palatine religious dispute in 1705. He alienated Lutherans because he only secured safeguards from the Palatine elector for Calvinist rights.⁸⁴ Again, Prussia secured one objective (in this case, alliance with the Palatinate), at the cost of hindering another (corpus directorship). Cooperation with the Palatinate over a dispute in Nassau-Siegen further illustrates the difficulty of playing the religious card in imperial politics. Prussia and the Palatinate wanted the small Westphalian principality to pay its share

⁸¹ The duchy of Calenberg (usually known after its capital as Hanover) was raised to an electorate in 1692, but this status was only fully accepted by its peers in 1708.

⁸² *Neue und vollständige Sammlung der Reichsabschiede*, 4 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1747), iv. 201–7; Arnold Berney, 'Der Reichstag zu Regensburg (1702–1704)', *Historische Vierteljahrschrift*, 24 (1929), 389–442.

⁸³ Examples in Peter H. Wilson, 'Militär und Religiosität in Württemberg, 1677–1797', in Michael Kaiser and Stefan Kroll (eds.), *Militär und Religiosität in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Hamburg, 2003), 71–96, at 79–84.

⁸⁴ The Prusso-Palatine treaty of 21 Nov. 1705 is printed in Loewe (ed.), *Preußens Staatsverträge Friedrichs I.*, 73–4. Further details in Aretin, *Altes Reich*, ii. 163–72.

of imperial war taxes, since these were being redirected to pay their own troops.⁸⁵ Prussia additionally wanted to discredit Prince Wilhelm Hyacinth who challenged Hohenzollern claims to the Orange inheritance. The prince had alienated both his Calvinist and Catholic subjects who appealed to the *Reichshofrat* against his arbitrary rule. The court deposed him in July 1707, placing the principality under an imperial commission. The local situation became increasingly fraught as some commissioners connived with the prince's officials, who revived persecution of the Calvinist population. Prussia lost credit when its new king, Frederick William, crassly threatened reprisals against his own Catholic minority. Meanwhile, Prusso-Palatine co-operation collapsed as the War of the Spanish Succession ended, leaving the imperial commission split down confessional lines by 1715. The emperor revoked its powers and transferred administration of Nassau-Siegen to the elector of Cologne in 1723.

Inability to balance multiple interests also finally thwarted Prussia's bid for the Protestant directory. The conversion of Augustus' son and heir to Catholicism in 1717 gave Frederick William the chance to renew Prussia's leadership bid and, within a year, Saxony was prepared to concede a co-directory. At this point, however, Sweden sued for peace in the Great Northern War (1700–21). Despite its considerable military power, Prussia was too weak to negotiate without Saxon and Hanoverian cooperation. Meanwhile, Frederick William needed the emperor's approval of his retention of part of Pomerania which his troops had conquered from the Swedes in 1715.⁸⁶ Catholics disputed the legality of the *corpus Evangelicorum* but, if it had to exist, preferred Saxon leadership. Imperial support for Saxony became so obvious that Augustus feared it was counter-productive. Protestant opinion, meanwhile, demanded a speedy resolution to the disputed directory because the elector Palatine had resumed persecution of his Lutheran subjects in 1719. Prussia and Hanover tried to outbid each other in their extremism, but merely alienated the smaller Protestant imperial Estates. In particular,

⁸⁵ LAM, A411 Nr. 19b.25 to 19b.28. The dispute is explained in greater detail by Werner Trossbach, 'Fürstenabsetzungen im 18. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung*, 13 (1986), 425–54, and Patrick Milton, 'Intervening against Tyrannical Rule in the Holy Roman Empire During the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *German History*, 32 (2014) forthcoming.

⁸⁶ Aretin, *Altes Reich*, ii. 255–62.

Frederick William's bluster and threats contrasted with Saxon discretion and success in presenting Protestant demands through the courts in a form acceptable to the Habsburgs. Intervention from the *Reichshofrat* resolved the Palatine crisis in 1722, while Emperor Charles VI secured Hanoverian and Prussian acquiescence by delaying investiture of their territorial gains from Sweden.⁸⁷

Another abortive attempt to displace Saxony as director in 1725 finally compelled Frederick William to try a different approach during renewed confessional tension following the expulsion of 20,000 crypto-Protestants by the prince-archbishop of Salzburg in 1731. This time, Prussia downplayed religious aspects, making only perfunctory protests through the Protestant corpus and rejecting calls to take reprisals against its own Catholic subjects. Instead, Frederick William agreed the 'Salzburg transaction' with Charles VI, who was keen to prevent Prussia defecting to a new Franco-Bavarian alliance. The king preserved his Protestant credentials by welcoming the Salzburg emigrants, who provided a useful influx of settlers to plague-ravaged eastern Prussia.⁸⁸ Charles VI dropped opposition to Prussian-sponsored legislation in the *Reichstag*, which now issued new guidelines for guilds and craft manufacture designed to promote state economic management, control migrant labour, and crush journeymen's organizations.⁸⁹ In return, Prussia acknowledged the Pragmatic Sanction permitting female inheritance in the Habsburg lands, and subsequently dropped its bid for the Protestant directory as part of a broader alliance with Austria, Saxony, and Russia at the outbreak of the War of the Polish Succession in 1733.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Karl Borgmann, *Der deutsche Religionsstreit der Jahre 1719–20* (Berlin, 1937). The wider diplomatic context is covered by Brendan Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire* (London, 2009), 145–52, and Andrew Thompson, *Britain, Hanover and the Protestant Interest* (Cambridge, 2006), 62–87.

⁸⁸ Mack Walker, *The Salzburg Transaction: Expulsion and Redemption in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Ithaca, NY, 1992), 70–141.

⁸⁹ Printed in Mack Walker, *German Home Towns: Community, State and General Estate* (2nd edn. Ithaca, 1998), 435–51.

⁹⁰ Prussia's declaration of 26 June 1731 is printed in Viktor Loewe (ed.), *Preußens Staatsverträge aus der Regierungszeit König Friedrich Wilhelms I.* (Leipzig, 1913), 397–9. See also J. L. Sutton, *The King's Honor and the King's Cardinal: The War of the Polish Succession* (Lexington, Ky., 1980), 36–9.

Part III: *Relations with Powerful Imperial Estates*

The next two sections shift the focus from the framework for interaction to the parties involved, beginning with Prussia's relations with those at the top of the imperial status hierarchy, before examining its involvement with minor imperial Estates. The perspective must be broadened initially beyond Prussia to see how its elevation to royalty contributed to the intensification of competition amongst the Empire's elite around 1700. The discussion lends weight to the cultural approach by revealing status as both an object of this competition and as a marker of shifts in material and military power. This provides a corrective to traditional narratives presenting the 'rise of Prussia' in fiscal-military terms in contrast to the alleged vanity of other German princes and their concern for 'empty' titles.

The most important structural shift in central European politics around 1700 was not Prussia's assumption of a royal title, but the dramatic growth of the Habsburg monarchy, underway since 1683 and completed by the capture of Belgrade in 1717. The Habsburgs now held more than one and a half times as much land outside imperial jurisdiction as within it, while the total size of their dynastic possessions and population were almost equal to those of the Empire.⁹¹ Austria's growth alarmed other European powers, especially around 1711 when it looked as if it might acquire the entire Spanish succession. Even closer cooperation with Spain in 1725 threatened to make it 'more formidable to the rest of Europe than ever Charles V was'.⁹² Austrian expansion could be accommodated within the Empire's hierarchy, because this already gave the emperor the senior position, while the Habsburgs had long used their hereditary possessions to support their imperial role. Moreover, Habsburg rule in Hungary predated the evolution of more modern concepts of sovereignty, which slowly displaced the medieval ideals of universal monarchy.⁹³

⁹¹ These statistics are set out in more detail in Peter H. Wilson, *From Reich to Revolution: German History, 1558–1806* (Basingstoke, 2004), 308, 310, 364–77.

⁹² Charles Townsend, quoted by Simms, *Three Victories*, 183.

⁹³ Franz Bosbach and Hermann Hiery (eds.), *Imperium – Empire – Reich: Ein Konzept politischer Herrschaft im deutsch-britischen Vergleich* (Munich, 1999); Peer Schmidt, *Spanische Universalmonarchie oder 'deutsche Libertät': Das spanische Imperium in der Propaganda des Dreißigjährigen Krieges* (Stuttgart, 2001).

However, it was becoming clearer that Habsburg power rested on their own territorial empire, rather than their formal position as Holy Roman emperor.

These changes posed two threats to the imperial Estates. First, their political status was intimately connected to the Empire, which was visibly declining within the evolving European order. Second, Austria's growth as a distinct great power made it less dependent on German assistance and, consequently, less open to pressure from the imperial Estates. The electors and senior princes had pushed for recognition as semi-regal since their engagement with other European monarchs at the Council of Basel (1431–49). The Westphalian peace congress of 1643–8 established broad parity of diplomatic ceremonial between sovereign monarchies, heightening anxieties amongst the imperial Estates that they risked reduction to the status of mere aristocrats. The result was 'an epidemic of desires and aspirations for a royal title'.⁹⁴

Unfortunately, the parallel development of fixing the imperial hierarchy with ever greater precision made it difficult to introduce new royal titles in the Empire. Bohemia had been elevated to a kingdom in the twelfth century at a time when the Empire included not only a German, but also Italian and Burgundian royal titles. The Italian and Burgundian titles fell out of use by the fourteenth century, while Bohemia's regal status became part of its privileged position *within* the Empire, rather than a basis for a *separate* existence.⁹⁵ Any potential conflict with the imperial hierarchy was minimized by Bohemia's possession by the Habsburgs since 1526. Likewise, the dynasty rejected the possibility of raising Austria to a kingdom in the 1620s on the grounds that their imperial title always trumped a royal one.⁹⁶

It was unclear which areas qualified as potential new kingdoms, beyond a general assumption that these should be a respectable size and, ideally, have some past association with royalty. This explains

⁹⁴ A. Waddington, *L'acquisition de la couronne royale de Prusse par les Hohenzollern* (Paris, 1883), 43.

⁹⁵ Jaroslav Pánek, 'Bohemia and the Empire: Acceptance and Rejection', in Evans and Wilson (eds.), *European Perspective*, 121–42.

⁹⁶ Georg Wagner, 'Pläne und Versuche der Erhebung Österreichs zum Königreich', in id. (ed.), *Österreich von der Staatsidee zum Nationalbewußtsein* (Vienna, 1982), 394–432.

why the royal ambitions of the Bavarian and Palatine Wittelsbachs centred on the Netherlands and Lower Rhine with the tradition of the early medieval Burgundian crown and the subsequent autonomy of much of this region through its special association with Spain after 1548.⁹⁷ It was also far from clear whether the emperor had the power to create new royal titles, since his ability to promote individual imperial Estates had become subject to the approval of their peers assembled in the *Reichstag*.⁹⁸ Emperor Leopold I (1658–1705) unilaterally raised Hanover to an electorate in 1692 and conferred semi-regal status on Savoy four years later, all in return for military backing. France exploited the disappointment of rival princes to split the Empire and offered backing to Bavarian, Palatine, and Württemberg royal ambitions. Bavaria accepted the bait in the War of the Spanish Succession and while the Palatinate refused, Württemberg opened serious negotiations in 1711–12.⁹⁹

These problems encouraged German princes to seek crowns outside the Empire. The elector Palatine initially considered Armenia, before dreaming of a Mediterranean kingdom including Sicily, Sardinia, Majorca, and Minorca.¹⁰⁰ Savoyard ambitions centred on Cyprus, but eventually settled for Sardinia in 1720. A Sardinian royal title did not challenge the Empire's internal hierarchy, because the island was outside imperial jurisdiction, while Savoy itself enjoyed considerable autonomy and no longer participated in imperial institutions after 1714.¹⁰¹ Dynastic ties of German princes to the Scandinavian monarchies could also be accommodated. The Danish and Swedish monarchs were already imperial vassals through their

⁹⁷ Nicolette Mout, 'Core and Periphery: The Netherlands and the Empire from the Late Fifteenth to the Early Seventeenth Centuries', in Evans and Wilson (eds.), *European Perspective*, 203–16; Reginald de Schryver, *Max II. Emanuel von Bayern und das Spanische Erbe* (Mainz, 1996).

⁹⁸ Thomas Klein, 'Die Erhebungen in den weltlichen Reichsfürstenstand 1550–1806', *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte*, 122 (1986), 137–92.

⁹⁹ Bernd Wunder, 'Die französisch-württembergischen Geheimverhandlungen 1711', *Zeitschrift für württembergische Landesgeschichte*, 28 (1969), 363–90. See generally Pelizaeus, *Aufstieg*.

¹⁰⁰ Klaus Müller, 'Kurfürst Johann Wilhelm und die europäische Politik seiner Zeit', *Düsseldorfer Jahrbuch*, 60 (1986), 1–23, at 13–14.

¹⁰¹ Robert Oresko, 'The House of Savoy in Search for a Royal Crown in the Seventeenth Century', in id., G. C. Gibbs, and H. M. Scott (eds.), *Royal and*

possession of Holstein and Pomerania respectively, while their new German-born monarchs entrusted their home principalities to relations.¹⁰²

The acquisition of Poland and Britain by Saxony (1697) and Hanover (1714) established a very different kind of 'personal union', directly combining rule of powerful kingdoms with leading German principalities.¹⁰³ Prussia's royal title introduced another, still more toxic kind of union.¹⁰⁴ Whereas Saxony and Hanover were joined to much larger kingdoms, Prussia itself was half the size of the other Hohenzollern possessions. It was Berlin, in the electorate of Brandenburg, which developed as the 'royal' capital, not Königsberg in Prussia, which was only used for the coronation in 1701.¹⁰⁵ Prussia had long been a Hohenzollern possession, whereas neither the Saxon Wettins nor Hanoverian Guelphs had close connections to their new

Republican Sovereignty in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge, 1999), 272–350; Matthias Schnettger, 'Das Alte Reich und Italien in der Frühen Neuzeit', *Quellen und Forschungen aus Italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken*, 79 (1999), 344–420.

¹⁰² Oldenburg was left under a junior line when its ruling family became Danish monarchs in 1440. Its status as an imperial Estate remained unaltered during direct Danish rule 1667–1773. The Pfalz-Kleeburg family entrusted their principality to relatives while they were Swedish monarchs 1654–1718. This practice was followed by Landgrave Friedrich I of Hessen-Kassel who succeeded them in 1720–51.

¹⁰³ Brendan Simms and Torsten Rott (eds.), *The Hanoverian Dimension in British History 1714–1837* (Cambridge, 2007); Rex Rexheuser (ed.), *Die Personalunionen von Sachsen-Polen 1697–1763 und Hannover-England 1714–1837* (Wiesbaden, 2005); Adam Perlakowski, 'The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and Electoral Saxony in the Early Eighteenth Century', in Evans and Wilson (eds.), *European Perspective*, 281–92.

¹⁰⁴ Peter Baumgart, 'Die preußische Königskrönung von 1701, das Reich und die europäische Politik', in Hauser (ed.), *Preußen*, 65–86; Ernst Hinrichs, 'Die Königskrönung vom 18. Januar 1701', in Matthias Weber (ed.), *Preußen in Ostmitteleuropa: Geschehensgeschichte und Verstehensgeschichte* (Munich, 2003), 35–61; Johannes Kunisch (ed.), *Dreihundert Jahre preußische Königskrönung* (Berlin, 2002).

¹⁰⁵ The Berlin palace was quadrupled in size, and court expenditure remained high even after the much publicized economies of 1713: Wolfgang Neugebauer, 'Hof und politisches System in Brandenburg-Preussen', *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands*, 46 (2000), 139–69.

kingdoms. More significantly, the Prussian title was a novelty, in contrast to the Polish and British crowns, which were accepted by all as valid. In short, the creation of the Prussian monarchy affected the established imperial hierarchy more directly than the other personal unions.

Frederick I received his title from Emperor Leopold, but crowned himself in a deliberately ostentatious coronation which was not repeated. His two successors' well-known 'antipathy to courtly spectacle' was clearly one reason for this abstinence.¹⁰⁶ However, it was not unusual. The Habsburgs dispensed with a coronation when they assumed a separate Austrian imperial title in 1804.¹⁰⁷ Bavaria and Württemberg likewise refrained from formal ceremonies when they received their royal titles from Napoleon in 1806.¹⁰⁸ The circumstances were indeed different in each of these elevations, but a common theme was the difficulty of fitting them into the established political order in central Europe.

While most European powers accepted the Prussian title by 1713, several still objected.¹⁰⁹ Poland's protests only seem irrelevant with hindsight, since it was still an important power in 1701. Moreover, by claiming that Prussia was still under Polish suzerainty, it struck at the basis for a fully sovereign Prussian crown. Poland's decline during the Great Northern War rendered its protests less significant, but it only dropped them in 1764 under pressure from Russia, then allied to Prussia.¹¹⁰ The Teutonic Order protested in September 1700, two months ahead of Leopold's grant of title to Frederick I. The Order had never accepted the conversion of its base in Prussia into a secu-

¹⁰⁶ Christopher Clark, 'When Culture Meets Power: The Prussian Coronation of 1701', in H. M. Scott and Brendan Simms (eds.), *Cultures of Power in Europe During the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2007), 14–35, at 30.

¹⁰⁷ Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv, Vienna, Titel und Wappen, Karton 3.

¹⁰⁸ Michael Kaiser, 'A Matter of Survival: Bavaria Becomes a Kingdom', in Alan Forrest and Peter H. Wilson (eds.), *The Bee and the Eagle: Napoleonic France and the End of the Holy Roman Empire, 1806* (Basingstoke, 2009), 94–111.

¹⁰⁹ For international recognition, see Loewe (ed.), *Preußens Staatsverträge Friedrich Wilhelms I.*, 8–15, 25–6.

¹¹⁰ Karin Friedrich, *The Other Prussia: Royal Prussia, Poland and Liberty, 1569–1772* (Cambridge, 2000), 161–5; ead. and Sara Smart (eds.), *The Cultivation of Monarchy and the Rise of Berlin: Brandenburg-Prussia 1700* (Farnham, 2010), 1–3, 10–19.

lar duchy under Hohenzollern rule in 1525. Backed by the papacy, the Order also complained that Prussia's elevation disturbed the confessional balance within the Empire to the disadvantage of Catholics. Though reduced to the tiny principality of Mergentheim, the Order possessed some influence through its choice of leading German princes as its grand masters, some of whom were also electors.¹¹¹ Their objections prevented Prussia from using the Teutonic legacy to underpin its new royal status. Few imperial Estates accepted the Order's argument that Prussia was still part of the imperial church lands, but the controversy provided a convenient excuse for the *Reichstag* to block Prussia's request that its new possessions of Neuchâtel and Valangin fall under imperial jurisdiction (and thus, protection) during the War of the Spanish Succession. Prussia had to settle for a Swiss declaration including them in their neutrality.¹¹² The papacy dropped its objections in 1787, but the Order persisted, creating yet another issue which could be raised by those wishing to delay other Prussian measures in the *Reichstag*; for example, in the negotiations for recognition of Prussian possession of Silesia after 1745.

Most electors accepted the Prussian title by 1703, with Bavaria and Cologne doing so in 1714 in return for Prussian support for their restoration after they lost their lands in the War of the Spanish Succession.¹¹³ Recognition eased but did not solve the problems surrounding Prussia's status in the Empire. Leopold I had only made Frederick king 'in' Prussia, meaning he was still merely an elector in

¹¹¹ The Order's objections are covered in Johann Jacob Moser, *Neues teutsches Staatsrecht*, 20 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1766–75), i. 121–33. Successive grand masters were chosen from the Palatine (1685–1732) and then Bavarian Wittelsbachs (1732–61). The post counted as a church office and the incumbents 1729–32 and 1732–61 were also electors of Mainz and Cologne respectively.

¹¹² Neuchâtel and its associated principality of Valangin had been acquired as part of the Orange inheritance in 1707. They remained personal possessions of Prussian kings until 1857. See also Moser, *Neues teutsches Staatsrecht*, i. 140; Loewe (ed.), *Preußens Staatsverträge Friedrichs I.*, 96–7.

¹¹³ Loewe (ed.), *Preußens Staatsverträge Friedrich Wilhelms I.*, 1–3, 41–3; Richard H. Thompson, *Lothar Franz von Schönborn and the Diplomacy of the Electorate of Mainz* (The Hague, 1973), 165–6; Eduard Ichon, *Die Verhandlungen über die Anerkennung der preussischen Königswürde am Reichstage zu Regensburg* (1701) (Heidelberg, 1907).

imperial politics. While this was formally true of Saxony and Hanover as well, their possession of 'real' crowns gave them an edge over Prussia.

Determined to assert Prussia's superiority over its German rivals, Frederick I sought to redefine his relationship to the emperor, initiating a policy which Frederick II pushed to the logical conclusion of ceremonial parity with Austria. The Hohenzollern court no longer accorded special status to the Austrian ambassador as an imperial envoy after 1701, largely to match how other European monarchs were treating the Habsburgs. The dispute escalated into a full breach of diplomatic relations by 1707, despite continued Austro-Prussian military cooperation against France.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, Prussia broke ranks with the other electors, abandoning their long-standing demand for recognition as regal and instead asserting the superiority of kings.¹¹⁵ This behaviour contributed to the speculation that Frederick harboured ambitions of becoming emperor. Internal discussions clearly indicate that he saw himself as a worthy candidate, but neither he nor Frederick William I wanted to pursue the idea.¹¹⁶

An important factor in their decision was knowledge that the Hanoverian electors were also potential candidates. Michael Kaiser has aptly characterized Hohenzollern-Wittelsbach relations as 'hidden competition', and the same term can be applied to relations with Hanover and Saxony: in each case convergence of interest was never sufficient to overcome the underlying antagonism.¹¹⁷ Circumstances might encourage cooperation, as between Prussia and the Palatinate during the War of the Spanish Succession, but the persistence in

¹¹⁴ Berney, *König Friedrich I.*, 216–20; Ingrao, *In Quest and Crisis*, 60–8; Klaus Müller, *Das kaiserliche Gesandtschaftswesen im Jahrhundert nach dem Westfälischen Frieden (1648–1740)* (Bonn, 1976), 125, 130, 133.

¹¹⁵ Andreas Pečar, 'Symbolische Politik: Handlungsspielräume im politischen Umgang mit zeremoniellen Normen. Brandenburg-Preußen und der Kaiserhof im Vergleich (1700–1740)', in Luh, Czech, and Becker (ed.), *Preussen, Deutschland und Europa*, 280–95, at 286, 289.

¹¹⁶ Waddington, *L'acquisition*, 391–2; Heinz Duchhardt, *Protestantisches Kaisertum und Altes Reich* (Wiesbaden, 1977), 255–65, 282.

¹¹⁷ Michael Kaiser, 'Die verdeckte Konkurrenz: Bayern und Preußen 1701–1871', in Luh, Czech, and Becker (ed.), *Preussen, Deutschland und Europa*, 90–127. A similar ambivalence is noted for Prusso-Hanoverian relations by Schnath, *Geschichte Hannovers*, iii. 543–606.

viewing politics as hierarchical left all electors locked in competition. Moreover, none of them saw the present situation as definitive. The military balance shifted markedly in Prussia's favour after 1714 and by 1740 it had more men than its four rivals combined.¹¹⁸ However, Hanover and Saxony were linked to powerful kingdoms with additional resources, whereas Prussia was on its own. The disparity in troop numbers was partially obscured by the continued splendour of the Bavarian, Palatine, and Saxon courts. The Saxons continued to regard Prussia more as a junior partner than a serious rival. That Prussia had 'no desire to bite' seemed confirmed by Saxony's success in retaining the directories of both the Upper Saxon *Kreis* and the Protestant corpus, as well as the failure of Frederick William's efforts to cause trouble for it in Poland.¹¹⁹ Saxony continued to prioritize relations with Russia as more important for its own position in Poland.

Likewise, the British viewed Prussia's military potential as unremarkable prior to the victories of Frederick II.¹²⁰ Prussia's rise also appeared less dramatic than Hanover's, which already doubled in size through incorporation of Celle in 1705. Hanover obtained the largest slice of Sweden's German territories, thanks to British support, whereas Prussia was forced to return most of its conquests in the peace of 1720. Through Britain, Hanover had the ability to thwart Prussia's plans, for example, lancing an attempt to join the Triple Alliance of Britain, France, and the Dutch Republic in 1717.¹²¹ Unsurprisingly, Frederick II still regarded Hanover and Saxony as his most dangerous opponents after Austria as late as 1752.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Strengths in summer 1740: Prussia 77,000; Saxony 29,000; Hanover 20,000; Bavaria and the Palatinate about 9,000 each.

¹¹⁹ Quotation from a Saxon military observer in 1727, Otto Krauske (ed.), *Die Briefe König Friedrich Wilhelms I. an den Fürsten Leopold von Anhalt-Dessau 1704–40* (Berlin, 1905), 19. See also Vötsch, *Kursachsen*, 161–5 and generally Frank Göse, 'Nachbarn, Partner und Rivalen: Die kursächsische Sicht auf Preußen im ausgehenden 17. und 18. Jahrhundert', in Luh, Czech, and Becker (ed.), *Preussen, Deutschland und Europa*, 45–78.

¹²⁰ Mark Wishon, 'Interaction and Perception in Anglo-German Armies 1689–1815' (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 2011), 83–95.

¹²¹ Ragnhild M. Hatton, *Diplomatic Relations Between Great Britain and the Dutch Republic 1714–1721* (London, 1950), 160–2.

¹²² Bardong (ed.), *Friedrich der Große*, 208–9, 223–4.

Two important conclusions can be drawn from this analysis of Prussia's relations with those at the top of the imperial hierarchy. First, titles and other symbolic markers of status mattered in 'real' politics, affecting, for instance, strategic calculations about potential rivals and allies, as well as intensifying competition amongst the leading militarized territories in the Empire. Second, the foregoing underscores the need to consider Prussia's relationship to the Empire as broader than its relationship with Austria. Prussian ambitions and methods were not fundamentally different from those of its rivals in Saxony, Hanover, Bavaria, and the Palatinate.

Part IV: *Relations with Minor Imperial Estates*

Discussions of Prussia's rise relative to the other German principalities conventionally concentrate on its internal development, especially under Frederick William I, who is usually credited with providing the means by which Frederick II successfully challenged Austria by conquering Silesia in 1740. Prussia's continued interest in the minor German territories has gone largely unnoticed. This interest was already strong in the 1690s, when acquisition of additional land in the Empire was seen as a way to present the Hohenzollerns as worthy of a royal title. Prussia's land hunger continued unabated after 1700, but the methods used to satiate it indicate how the Hohenzollerns remained within conventional imperial politics, despite joining the ranks of European royalty.

The scope of their ambitions is already striking. The lands of their Franconian relations in Ansbach and Bayreuth topped the list of desirable additions, along with the smaller principalities of their Swabian relations in Hohenzollern and Haigerloch, plus the extensive Orange inheritance left by the death of King William III (1689–1702).¹²³ Additional targets included the north German principalities of East Frisia and Mecklenburg, plus Hanau (near Frankfurt) and Mömpelgard (south-west of Basel). Prussia still wanted Jülich and Berg in Westphalia, despite frequent agreements assigning these

¹²³ Prussian claims derived from the Great Elector's marriage to William III's aunt, Luise Henrietta. Prussia eventually obtained Moers, Lingen, Upper Geldern, and Neuchâtel.

to the Neuburg branch of the Palatine Wittelsbachs. Less well known are Prussia's designs on other Westphalian lands, including Limburg and Tecklenburg, as well as the imperial abbeys of Essen, Werden, and Herford, and the imperial city of Dortmund. Prussia also wanted the cities of Nordhausen and Hildesheim in Lower Saxony, the counties of Mansfeld and Wernigerode plus the abbey of Quedlinburg in Upper Saxony, and the Franconian counties of Limpurg-Speckfeld and Geyer.

These lands were not necessarily insignificant. Bayreuth, Ansbach, Mecklenburg, and East Frisia all had populations of over 100,000, while Frederick I estimated the lands of the Orange inheritance were worth 60 million taler and would produce 400,000 taler additional annual revenue.¹²⁴ The imperial city of Nordhausen was strategically located near the extensive silver mines of the Lüneburg region. Prussia relied heavily on men from across the Empire to sustain its inflated military establishment after 1713 and saw acquisition of even small enclaves as useful in extending its recruitment net.¹²⁵ However, material factors alone do not explain why Prussia targeted particular territories, or why it invested so much effort in what were often minor pieces of real estate.

The Lutheran character of most of these lands was noted positively by Prussian officials, but Prussia was also interested in Catholic lands like Jülich, Berg, Hohenzollern, Haigerloch, Essen, and Werden.¹²⁶ Dynasticism was far more significant, not only in establishing viable claims, but also for status. Frederick I was keen to assert his position as Hohenzollern family patriarch and wrote this into his agreements with his Swabian and Franconian relations in 1695 and 1707.¹²⁷ Failure to assert claims could undermine prestige. Frederick I's desire to secure his share of the Orange inheritance was a major factor in his involvement in the War of the Spanish

¹²⁴ Schnath, *Geschichte Hannovers*, iii. 563. This was equivalent to over 12 per cent of Prussia's revenue in 1700.

¹²⁵ Peter H. Wilson, 'The Politics of Military Recruitment in Eighteenth-Century Germany', *English Historical Review*, 117 (2002), 536–68.

¹²⁶ The fact that the Limpurg population was predominantly Lutheran was noted positively by Frederick I's advisers: Rudolf Endres, 'Preußens Griff nach Franken', in Duchhardt (ed.), *Friedrich der Große*, 57–79, at 60–1.

¹²⁷ Moerner (ed.), *Kurbrandenburgische Staatsverträge*, 607; Loewe (ed.), *Preußens Staatsverträge Friedrichs I.*, 81–3.

Succession.¹²⁸ His third marriage to a Mecklenburg princess established claims there which encouraged Prussian involvement in that duchy's increasingly turbulent internal affairs.¹²⁹ However, dynasticism does not explain why Prussia was interested in territories where it had no such ties.

Some lands offered a way to improve Prussian influence in the Empire's institutions and regions. Acquisition of Moers brought an additional princely vote in the *Reichstag*. Prussia wanted more votes, and agreed to cooperate with Württemberg to lobby for this.¹³⁰ The prospect of acquiring Swabian or Franconian land might bring further princely votes (in the case of Ansbach and Bayreuth), and extend Prussian influence in two *Kreis* assemblies where it lacked representation. Far from wanting to detach from the Empire, Prussia pushed for even its smallest gains to be represented in imperial institutions. This met strong local opposition, as we saw above in the case of the collective vote of the Westphalian counts. Likewise, the Franconians kept Prussia out of their *Kreis* assembly by denying representation to the county of Geyer, which Frederick I bought in 1710.

Acquisition of Geyer was opportunistic. Prussia persuaded its last count to sell his inheritance in 1696 in return for interim rights of usage and assistance against his numerous creditors in cases before the imperial courts.¹³¹ Elsewhere, Prussia used rights associated with one possession to claim others. For example, firm possession of Cleves by 1648 gave Prussia that duchy's network of treaties with minor Westphalian territories like Essen and Herford. Likewise, acquisition of Magdeburg in 1680 brought feudal jurisdiction over neighbouring Mansfeld and Wernigerode. Prussia became more aggressive in asserting these rights as the competition intensified among the electors around 1700. Thus, just as Prussia was reaching into the realm of European power relations, it was also becoming more deeply embedded in imperial politics. It could not afford to

¹²⁸ As argued by Frey and Frey, *Frederick I*, 191, 200–10, 217.

¹²⁹ Treaty with Mecklenburg-Schwerin 1708 in Loewe (ed.), *Preußens Staatsverträge Friedrichs I.*, 92–6. More detail in Göse, *Friedrich I.*, 177, 181–5.

¹³⁰ In their treaties of 1716 and 1731, Prussia promised to back Württemberg's bid for a vote for its duchy of Teck, in return for Württemberg support for a princely vote for Neumark, the part of Brandenburg east of the Oder.

¹³¹ Moerner (ed.), *Kurbrandenburgische Staatsverträge*, 612; Loewe (ed.), *Preußens Staatsverträge Friedrichs I.*, 32–3, 71–3.

give ground in the Empire, even on comparatively minor issues, whilst its own international influence and status remained in flux. Significantly, Prussia's targets were all along fault lines with Hanover, Saxony, or Habsburg clients like Bamberg in Franconia. For example, Prussian military occupation of Nordhausen in 1703 was a direct response to Hanoverian success in pre-empting it in Hildesheim a few weeks earlier.¹³²

The conventions of imperial politics also shaped how Prussia pursued these objectives. Political legitimacy remained defined by the imperial constitution. Prussia could not use its military superiority without compromising the very claims it sought to advance. For example, Prussian intervention in Nordhausen was legitimized by invoking protectorate rights over the city already purchased from Saxony in 1697, while the city's continued autonomy was guaranteed in a treaty with its council.¹³³ Careful preparations preceded intervention in Bayreuth in 1705 to secure Prussia's inheritance claims. Not only did Prussia obtain permission from Bayreuth, but it sent a battalion hired from Nassau-Dillenburg rather than one of its own units.¹³⁴ Similar arguments were used to justify a military presence in Geyer and East Frisia.¹³⁵ Prussia also secured peacekeeping mandates from the *Reichshofrat* for its troops in East Frisia in the 1720s, and for its intervention in Gotha in 1703 which was intended to balance Hanover's occupation of Brunswick.¹³⁶

¹³² The intervention in Hildesheim was actually carried out by Celle, but advanced Hanoverian interests. See Heinz Josef Adamski, *Der welfische Schutz über die Stadt Hildesheim* (Hildesheim, 1939), 95–8; Hans Silberborth, *Preußen und Hannover im Kampf um die Reichsstadt Nordhausen 1697–1715* (Nordhausen, 1936).

¹³³ Loewe (ed.), *Preußens Staatsverträge Friedrichs I.*, 30–1.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 62–3, 77. For the Dillenburg unit, see LAM, A411 Nr.1a.28 (4 vols.).

¹³⁵ For the latter, see Bernd Kappelhof, *Absolutistisches Regiment oder Ständeherrschaft? Landesherr und Landstände in Ostfriesland im ersten Drittel des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Hildesheim, 1982), esp. 19, 77–86, 243. The Prussian presence in East Frisia guarded the European base of the Brandenburg African Company.

¹³⁶ The operations in 1703 were to prevent Brunswick and Gotha joining France during the War of the Spanish Succession. See Georg Schnath, 'Die Überwältigung Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttels durch Hannover und Celle zu Beginn des Spanischen Erbfolgekriegs, März 1702', *Braunschweigisches Jahrbuch*, 56 (1975), 27–100.

Troops were useful in pre-empting rivals and adding pressure in negotiations, but Prussia did not yet see naked force as a viable means to achieve its goals. Despite its reputation as the impoverished 'sandbox of the Empire', Prussia was rich relative to most of the much smaller German principalities. It was able to pay 250,000 taler to buy out the last count of Tecklenburg in 1707, and give Saxony 300,000 taler for its protectorate rights over Quedlinburg and Nordhausen in 1697. Generous payments bought off rival claims to Geyer, where the last count's widow received a Prussian pension, while the Orange inheritance dispute was finally only settled in 1732, when Prussia paid Nassau-Dietz to drop its rights.¹³⁷ Prussia also traded its own claims, abandoning a bid for Mömpelgard in return for Württemberg's support over Limpurg-Speckfeld in 1709. Eleven years later, Frederick William even proposed exchanging Neuchâtel with the count of Mansfeld.

Saxony had long opposed Prussian designs on Mansfeld and backed Emperor Charles VI who made the dispute a test case against Prussian influence in northern Germany, forcing Frederick William to return the land to its count in 1716. The count died five years later, while his successor proved an inveterate gambler. Using the excuse of financial mismanagement, Frederick William seized the count's last assets, bluntly telling him 'to kiss my arse'.¹³⁸ However, Prussia's action rested on a strong legal basis, including well-established rights to much of the county already. Moreover, like Saxony, Prussia claimed feudal jurisdiction over Mansfeld, denying that it was a fully immediate territory. In short, Prussia was employing methods entirely typical of imperial politics to advance goals by exploiting legal and constitutional ambiguities, rather than direct force.

The case of the Westphalian imperial abbey of Herford illustrates this further. Prussia's acquisition of Cleves in 1609 allowed it to claim a protectorate over Herford on the basis of a treaty between the duchy and the abbey from 1485. Protectorates had long been a way of extending domination over small territories, because the stronger

¹³⁷ See the agreements in Loewe (ed.), *Preußens Staatsverträge Friedrich Wilhelms I.*, 83, 404–17.

¹³⁸ Quoted in Elisabeth Schwarze-Neuss, 'Untersuchungen zur Verfassungs- und Verwaltungsgeschichte der Grafschaft Mansfeld, insbesondere der magdeburgisch-preußischen Hoheit', *Sachsen und Anhalt*, 18 (1994), 525–49, at 538.

partner frequently assumed responsibility for discharging the weaker one's imperial obligations. Brandenburg had already annexed the town of Herford in 1652, claiming it was not a full imperial Estate.¹³⁹ Whereas the Great Elector had blockaded the inhabitants until they agreed, Frederick I was not prepared to risk harming his prestige by using violence. Instead, he abused his position as co-director of the Westphalian *Kreis* to stop inviting the abbess to the *Kreis* assembly after 1697 on the grounds that, as a protectorate, the abbey was not a full imperial Estate.¹⁴⁰ With no territory beyond the abbey itself, Abbess Charlotte Sophie might be expected to have been crushed by the Prussian behemoth. Yet her response showed the continued efficacy of the imperial constitution in protecting its weakest elements. She produced lists of *Kreis* members in 1599 and 1648 to prove precedent for her representation in the assembly, and published imperial mandates forwarded to her by the imperial chancellory to demonstrate her status as imperial Estate.¹⁴¹ When this failed, she prosecuted Prussia in the *Reichshofrat*, which obliged Frederick I to accept the abbey as fully immediate in return for the abbess' confirmation of the protectorate.¹⁴²

Prussia suffered numerous, more substantial setbacks. Having being forced to withdraw its troops from Bayreuth in 1707, Prussia was compelled by Charles VI in 1722 to annul a favourable inheritance treaty it had negotiated with its Franconian relations in 1703.¹⁴³ Meanwhile, the claims which had been so expensively established in Geyer and Limpurg-Speckfeld were successfully contested by the heiresses of both counties in the imperial courts. Prussia resigned its claims to Ansbach in 1729 and disengaged from Franconia, where its influence rested tenuously on the Prussian wives of the two Franconian Hohenzollern princes.¹⁴⁴ Prussia was defeated in Lower

¹³⁹ Rainer Pape, *Sancta Herfordia: Geschichte Herfords von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Herford, 1979), 207–19.

¹⁴⁰ LAM, A230 Nr. 90, esp. complaint from the abbess of Herford, 7 Mar. 1702.

¹⁴¹ LAM, A230, Nr. 98.

¹⁴² The agreement from 20 Oct. 1705 is printed in Loewe (ed.), *Preußens Staatsverträge Friedrichs I.*, 69–71.

¹⁴³ Loewe (ed.), *Preußens Staatsverträge Friedrich Wilhelms I.*, 45–8, 62–3.

¹⁴⁴ Cletus Weber, *Die äussere Politik des Markgrafen Karl Wilhelm Friedrich von Brandenburg-Ansbach 1729–1757* (Erlangen, 1909).

Saxony, where Hanover obliged it to sell its protectorate over Nordhausen in 1715. Hanover, meanwhile, blocked Prussian influence in Mecklenburg, thanks to backing from Charles VI into the 1730s.¹⁴⁵ By contrast, Hanover retained a permanent garrison in Hildesheim after 1711.

The outcome in Upper Saxony was more favourable to Prussia. Count Stolberg accepted Prussian overlordship over his county of Wernigerode in May 1714, while Prussia retained rights over Mansfeld, though only secured physical possession on the death of the last count in 1780.¹⁴⁶ Prussia's position in Westphalia improved with its relations to Austria after 1728, and it finally acquired Tecklenburg once Charles VI dropped his support for a rival claim from Bentheim.¹⁴⁷ The emperor also mandated a Prussian military presence in Mecklenburg as imperial peacekeepers after 1733, as well as a briefer occupation of the imperial city of Mühlhausen in 1733–5 on the same grounds. However, he did not abandon the lesser territories altogether. The abbe of Herford ignored Frederick William's letters as hereditary protector, and refused to pay Prussia to provide her imperial contingent in the War of the Polish Succession.¹⁴⁸ Other than East Frisia, the other lesser Westphalian territories repudiated long-standing agreements with Prussia in 1715 and either provided their own troops in future, or contracted less threatening territories like Münster instead.¹⁴⁹

Far from lessening Prussia's engagement with the smaller territories, the process of acquiring and consolidating the royal title increased the Hohenzollerns' appetite for comparatively minor advantages across the Empire. In pursuing its goals, Prussia used its significantly greater political and material resources, including applying coercion, but was not more aggressive than its rivals amongst the electors. Nor did it seriously breach accepted norms, unlike Bavaria, which openly defied the emperor during the War of

¹⁴⁵ Details in Hughes, *Law and Politics*.

¹⁴⁶ The agreement over Wernigerode is printed in Loewe (ed.), *Preußens Staatsverträge Friedrich Wilhelms I.*, 58–67.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 384–91.

¹⁴⁸ LAM A230 Nr. 1084.

¹⁴⁹ Kurt Hüsken, 'Die militärische Vertretung des Stifts Essen durch Brandenburg-Preußen im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert', *Beiträge zur Geschichte von Stadt und Stift Essen*, 30 (1909), 1–92.

the Spanish Succession and besieged the imperial city of Ulm. This underlines the general point about imperial political culture conserving the Empire, whilst inhibiting change and limiting the options of its components. Prussia's reluctance to transgress obliged it to accept repeated setbacks at the hands of comparatively minor territories, and to forgo both material and symbolic advantages. However, compliance with imperial mandates and court verdicts at least enabled Prussia to minimize damage to its prestige by demonstrating respect for the established order.

Conclusion

Acquisition of a royal crown changed how Prussia interacted with the Empire, but did not affect the radical departure that the revolution of 1789 had on French behaviour.¹⁵⁰ Unlike the revolutionaries, Prussia craved recognition of its new status within the Empire and Europe and avoided actions liable to be judged illegitimate by conventional standards.¹⁵¹ It was not free to pursue policies towards the Empire after 1700 as a fully independent kingdom, but remained embedded in existing formal and informal patterns of interaction with the Empire as a whole, and continued to engage with the entire range of its territories from Austria to the abbey of Herford.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the traditional interpretation should not simply be replaced by one claiming a stronger Empire and weaker Prussia. Prussia was growing stronger in conventional terms of military and institutional power, and this, together with Austria's more substantial expansion and the increasing internationalization of imperial politics through phenomena like personal unions, all weakened the Empire's coherence and efficacy. The cultural approach helps explain why the Empire continued to cohere despite these shifts in 'real' power. However, this approach only gains real value when integrated into a discussion of power politics to reveal how

¹⁵⁰ Sidney Seymour Biro, *The German Policy of Revolutionary France: A Study in French Diplomacy During the War of the First Coalition 1792-1797* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957).

¹⁵¹ E.g. the Hohenzollerns followed established norms in the exchange of diplomatic gifts: Jeannette Falcke, *Studien zum diplomatischen Geschenkwesen am brandenburgisch-preußischen Hof im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2006).

beliefs about acceptable behaviour influenced choices and actions. The empire did not exist purely on the pages of the *Reichspublizisten* or in the speeches at the *Reichstag*. It lived through the interaction of all its components in a way that affected 'hard' politics, like who gained possession of which land.

Prussia's position in this complex interaction cannot be adequately measured purely through its dealings with formal institutions, and certainly should not be reduced to a footnote in its rivalry with Austria. Indeed, the partial contraction of Prussian influence in the Empire after 1713 coincided with mounting problems in the Habsburg monarchy which grew more pronounced during the War of the Polish Succession and the Turkish War of 1737–9. Frederick William's ambitions in Franconia and elsewhere were checked less by the emperor's military power than the continued resilience of imperial politics and the general antipathy towards Prussia's bullying tactics. The key change in 1740 was not a shift in the 'real' political-military balance between Austria and Prussia, but the accession in Frederick II of a man who held the imperial constitution in contempt and refused to be bound by its rules.

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