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Monarchical State-building through State Destruction: Hohenzollern Self-legitimization at the Expense of Deposed Dynasties in the Kaiserreich*

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Abstract

The German War of 1866 was a turning point in the consolidation of Prussian hegemony over the emerging German nation-state. This article engages with a neglected aspect of this process by investigating the destabilizing effect of Prussia's territorial expansion at the expense of fellow monarchies in Hanover, Hessen-Kassel, Nassau and Schleswig-Holstein. It argues that the hostile response of ruling houses related to the deposed dynasties and the disapprobation of legitimists at home placed the Hohenzollerns in a difficult position, as they often found themselves caught between the informal yet palpable pressure of Europe's 'Royal International' and the policies pursued by their chancellor, Otto von Bismarck. To escape this dilemma, King (from 1871 onwards Kaiser) Wilhelm and his successors sought to bring about a reconciliation with the alienated dynasties through treaty settlements, intermarriage and the appropriation of their rivals' symbolic capital in public speech acts. The way in which the Hohenzollerns courted their detractors betrayed a versatility that scholarship on the Prussian cult of monarchy has yet to fully appreciate. In fact, the Hohenzollern court's long-term preoccupation with sectional reconciliation reveals much not only about royal diplomacy in the second half of the nineteenth century but also about the workings of Germany's monarchocentric federal edifice and the role of civic initiative in the promotion of monarchical legitimacy.

On an overcast late-autumn morning in October 1909 thousands of curious citizens migrated to the Adolphshöhe near Biebrich in the Prussian province of Hesse-Nassau. While they took their seats on specially erected bleachers, several hundred guests of honour entered a fenced-off area, at whose centre stood a large podium and tent. Here the province's leading officials and military officers awaited the arrival of Prince August Wilhelm of Prussia, the grand duke of Baden, the prince and princess of Wied and—most intriguingly—an official delegation from Luxembourg headed by Crown Princess Marie Adelheid. The occasion for this high-profile spectacle was the unveiling of the Nassauvian State Monument (*Nassauisches Landesdenkmal*), which celebrated the achievements of the Nassau dynasty as rulers of the eponymous duchy (1815–1866). In his welcome speech, the chairman of the monument committee praised Princess

Adelheid Marie's Nassauvian ancestors for having fused the disparate territories they had acquired during the Napoleonic period into one state with a durable identity. The state monument itself expanded on this message with allegorical representations of glory, love and loyalty below a statue of Nassau's last duke, Adolph, who had inherited the grand ducal crown of Luxembourg in 1890. To dispel any last doubts about the intended message of the memorial, the eye-catching obelisk behind the statue of Adolph carried the inscription 'To the Nassauvian ruling house in love and veneration, their grateful people, 1909'.¹

At first glance this apotheosis of a dynast, about whom Kaiser Wilhelm II privately said that he would have been better suited for the life of a forest ranger, appears like one of the many invented traditions through which Wilhelmine Germans symbolically experienced royal authority. What made the ceremony nevertheless stand out was the fact that the House of Nassau had not reigned in Nassau for more than forty years and that the very Hohenzollerns whose representative was now joining in the festivities had been the cause of their relatives' dethronement. Duke Adolph had refused to take Prussia's side in the German civil war of 1866 and as punishment the victorious Hohenzollerns had annexed Nassau along with other uncooperative states like the kingdom of Hanover, the electorate of Hesse-Kassel and the city of Frankfurt.² 'The very existence of said states between the eastern and western halves of the [Prussian] monarchy is a geographical threat', thundered Bismarck in the cabinet meeting where the decision was taken, and when the Russian tsar, Alexander II, protested against the removal of monarchs ruling by divine grace, the Prussian chief minister rejoined that Prussia would proclaim the Constitution of 1849 and unfurl the red banner of revolution should any foreign power intervene.³ As if to drive home the point Berlin defied the claim of the Sonderburg-Augustenburg dynasty to Schleswig-Holstein and absorbed the two duchies for good measure as well, garnering Bismarck the reputation of an uncompromising 'white revolutionary' in the service of Prussian *raison d'état*.⁴ What, then, explains the ostentatious display of inter-dynastic reconciliation at Biebrich several decades later? Was the unveiling of the Nassauvian State Monument just an aberration or did it perhaps signify something else about monarchical legitimacy in the *Kaiserreich*?

To answer these deceptively simple questions, due consideration must be given to the remarkably long-lived performance of Europe's royal houses as engines of modernization. Not long ago the historian Dieter Langewiesche paid tribute to their achievements by renaming the 1800s the 'century of monarchy' because the crowns were not only among the few time-honoured institutions to survive the transformations wrought by the French Revolution but also successfully engineered state-building reforms that enabled commercial, cultural and other kinds of progress in the first place and made monarchs valued intermediaries between past and present.⁵ Although Langewiesche's brief reflections can but paint a rough sketch of historical change, his work is emblematic of the wider reassessment that the history of monarchy has undergone in recent work on nationalism, the development of mass culture, constitutional governance and ancillary areas of modernization. The 'Heirs to the Throne' research project currently underway at the University of St Andrews under the leadership of Frank Lorenz Müller, Robert Hazell's comparative research on western European monarchies at University College London's 'Constitution Unit', as well as the flourishing forum for debate provided by the Society for Court Studies and the Royal Studies Network with their attendant journals confirm the return of kings and queens to the mainstream of Anglo-American historiography, not to mention parallel developments in other countries.⁶ That said, the fact that monarchs still manage to attract so much scholarly attention in spite of the sophisticated challenge presented by 'history from below' is a sign of as yet unanswered questions about the adaptability of monarchies to changing socio-political environments, the global projection of European power in the nineteenth century and the mechanics of international relations.⁷

Mindful of the German War's sesquicentennial in 2016, the present article contributes to this thriving field of enquiry by investigating the phenomenon of dynastic 'state-building through state destruction' against the background of subnational political entities' consolidation into nation-states during the nineteenth century.⁸ If one adopts Volker Sellin's heuristic distinction between countries that opted for monarchical constitutions after their creation like Belgium, countries whose monarchies were instrumental in the establishment of the nation-state like France, and, finally, syntheses of both like Britain, the Prussian method of national unification at the expense of other dynasts constituted a special manifestation of the second type.⁹ State creation through conquest entailed special risks, though: it will be argued that Prussia's actions in the

summer of 1866 hurt its own credibility in the eyes of monarchical legitimists and foreign rulers, and that the Hohenzollerns therefore made it a priority to mend fences with the dynasties they had dispossessed.

The process of reconciliation played out before both diplomatic and domestic audiences. The exiled monarchs had familial ties to other European courts that showed irritation at Berlin's high-handed conduct, not least because of the violation of their own agnatic rights by the abolition of the thrones in question. Although neither Tsar Alexander II nor Queen Victoria of England went so far as to pursue retaliation by violent means, resentment lingered for the treatment meted out to their relatives and occasionally the grievances of these courts rose to the surface during moments of international tension. In the domestic sphere the dethronement of the Guelph, Brabant, Nassauvian and Augustenburg dynasties was likewise sure to remain a contentious issue due to the 'monarchocentric' make-up of the German polity.¹⁰ The larger states of the 'Third Germany' such as Hanover had developed elaborate 'tribal' (*stammlich*) and other cultural idioms to anchor dynastic loyalty in the minds of the heterogeneous populations acquired from the debris of the Holy Roman Empire.¹¹ From the vantage point of state-building, Prussia's displacement of four legitimate dynasties therefore became, according to Hans Schmitt, the 'most embarrassing consequence of the war of 1866' because the Hohenzollerns could never feel quite sure of their new subjects' loyalty as long as the monarchs in exile refused to relinquish their titles and thereby presented a latent alternative to the Prussian system of rule.¹²

The pacification of the annexed provinces was complicated by the two-pronged mission of Hohenzollern state-building, which pursued the dual aim of making Prussians and raising Germans. School textbooks, patriotic commemorations and the army insisted that the two identities went hand in glove, even though Hanoverians and Nassauers often found it easier to identify with the Hohenzollerns as figureheads of the entire German nation than as champions of Prussian particularist traditions that clashed with their contrarian historical memories.¹³ This essay will explore the strategies Hohenzollern rulers developed to cement their fragile legitimacy. These solutions were not free from contradictions because, as Mark Hewitson shrewdly notes, by Wilhelm II's reign the popularity of the kaiser 'came to rest either on the rapid invention of political traditions or on a cult of modernity, confusingly mixed with archaism, that was

designed to compensate for any political shortcomings'.¹⁴ Due to such paradoxes some historians conclude that the Hohenzollern court proved unable, in the final analysis, to devise popular, national rituals in place of the older Prussian dynastic ones.¹⁵ By contrast, it will be suggested that the symbolic assimilation of the annexed provinces into Prussia's cult of monarchy bore a nuance that made Hohenzollern kingship both Prussian *and* transcendental. The first part of the discussion will examine why the German War was a historical watershed for the Hohenzollerns before I turn in the second and third sections to the foreign-political and domestic aftermath of this event.

A 'Rude Shock': The Overthrow of Monarchies in Historical Context

King Wilhelm's assent to the removal of fellow monarchs at the end of the German War was in itself neither unusual nor novel. Rulers reigning 'by divine providence' could look back on a long series of revolts and wars in which either their subjects or even foreign rivals had challenged their authority to govern. The most serious attack on divine monarchy had emanated from the French Revolution, followed by Napoleon's dethronement of established dynasties like the Bourbons in Spain and the mediatization of smaller principalities in Germany and the Italian peninsula. Prussia itself became one of the major beneficiaries of Napoleon's reforms at the Congress of Vienna (1815), where the Hohenzollerns acquired territories previously seized from the Catholic church and imperial knights in the Rhineland and Westphalia.¹⁶ Yet the fifty years of relative peace spanning the end of the Napoleonic era and the German Wars of Unification (1863–71) afforded the 'satiated' monarchies in Germany a much-needed opportunity to consolidate their gains and discredit anyone who wilfully upset the status quo. This readjustment to the exigencies of state-building prompted an expansion of government bureaucracies, conscription and new patriotic pedagogies that were premised on the idea that sovereigns ruled over self-evident, organically grown communities.

A notable practitioner was the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm IV (ruled 1840–1861), whose mystical conception of kingship was founded on the belief that divinely enlightened monarchs should govern on behalf of and, where necessary, in consultation

with the ancient corporations (*Stände*) of the realm.¹⁷ The fiction of natural harmony between the interests of the crown and the people was taken even further in the medium-sized German states. Here propagandists employed the metaphor of the *Stamm*, which carried not only primordial, quasi-ethnic connotations of ‘tribal’ group relations but also configured the dynasty as a tree trunk with branches that signified territories and populations won through inheritance, war or diplomacy over time.¹⁸ This symbolic visualization implied that subjects enjoyed the benefits of order, stability and prosperity thanks to the crown because the achievements of the state and the ruling house were one and the same. The author of a widely used Hanoverian textbook for secondary schools from the early 1860s expressed these sentiments well when he reminded his readers that for as long as king and subjects ‘recognized their common destiny and stood by each other faithfully from beginning to end’, they would master all adversity.¹⁹ Tellingly, too, a similar textbook from Nassau made the frank admission that the history of the ruling house formed ‘quite naturally’ the red thread of regional history on account of the duchy’s artificial genesis.²⁰ The revalorization of monarchical legitimacy in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars enabled combative defenders of royal sovereignty like Georg V of Hanover, Adolph of Nassau, Friedrich Wilhelm of Hessen-Kassel and Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia’s successor, Wilhelm, to implement unpopular policies and survive political battles with their parliaments that might otherwise have cost them their crowns.²¹

To return to the question of why the dethronement of unloved German princes in 1866 would attract so much attention, the simple answer is that this coup was staged not by revolutionary firebrands or political upstarts but rather by a conservative monarch against like-minded peers. Wilhelm himself hesitated for a moment to divest his adversaries of their legitimate patrimony because he felt that such a step smacked too much of ‘Emperor Napoleon’s acts of violence’.²² Alexander II of Russia warned his uncle of the ‘rude shock’ that the monarchical principle was about to suffer. Confronted with weighty problems of his own following a recent Polish uprising and serf emancipation, the tsar’s reception of the Hanoverian envoy sent to St Petersburg to enlist his help was more gloomy still: ‘It only remains for me to wish that the social order and peace of Europe have not been upset too much by the consequences of this crisis.’²³ Although the prospect of territorial gains swayed Wilhelm to proceed with the annexations all the same, this did not put an end to critics’ downbeat predictions. On

the contrary, Prussian conservatives of the *Kreuzzeitungspartei* variety and *großdeutsch* federalists felt they now had all the more reason to accuse the Prussian court of wanting to establish a ‘caesarist’ universal monarchy that would upset the balance of power in Europe and make the government beholden to the inchoate will of the masses.²⁴ Bismarck’s former mentor and confidant of Friedrich Wilhelm IV, Ernst Ludwig von Gerlach, voiced his protest in a most poignant, albeit incongruous, way by getting himself elected to the very body conservatives associated with Bismarckian caesarism, the *Reichstag*, as a candidate for the anti-governmental Guelph-Centre Party coalition in Hanover.²⁵ Gerlach’s alliance with the Centre was no coincidence, for the party leader, the Hanoverian ex-justice minister Ludwig Windhorst, was a firm believer in dynastic rights and advised the Guelphs on legal matters.²⁶ Some members of the clergy (most notably orthodox Lutherans in Hanover and the Hessian *Renitenz* around August Vilmar) lent moral support to the legitimist cause in condemning the Hohenzollern for their infringement of the eighth commandment, ‘Thou shalt not steal’.²⁷ Unsurprisingly, the deposed princes and their apologists tried to capitalize on previous state-building efforts in order to convince public opinion that the philosophy of ‘might makes right’ provided an unattractive, if not to say unholy, basis for subjects’ loyalty to the sovereign. ‘The oldest dynasty in Europe’, began a popular appeal by the Hanoverian Guelphs to boycott the promulgation of the annexation law,

your royal house, with whom you have shared good and bad times for a thousand years, with whose magnificent ancestors your brave and noble forebears have won glory on the battlefield ... and made Hanover a respected name in peaceful competition with other German brother tribes, will cease to exist; a foreign king will govern you who, despite being a German prince, has nothing in common with you except that his crown comes from the same place as that of your ancestral ruling house—from the Lord’s table, which is to say by divine grace.²⁸

Not content to merely protest, Georg V paid journalists and press agents lavish sums to sway southern German and foreign governments in favour of intervention on his behalf. His personal wealth allowed him for a time to spend as much on bribes to the French press as Prussia and Austria-Hungary.²⁹ In addition, the exiled king funded paramilitary expatriate organizations in Britain and France, collectively known as the ‘Guelph Legion’, to prepare for a future European war in which they would side with Prussia’s enemies to liberate the Hanoverian fatherland.³⁰ Finally, after notifying

European governments of his refusal to acknowledge the legality of Prussia's conquests—the elector of Hesse-Kassel would do the same two years later, in 1868—Georg V put out feelers to other disaffected courts to sound out the possibility of concerted action against Prussia. The negotiations with Vienna, Paris and Florence were serious enough to trouble Bismarck because they precipitated unfavourable rumours in the southern German kingdoms during the lead-up to the Franco-Prussian War that Napoleon III planned the creation of a Guelph-ruled buffer state between France and Prussia.³¹

To be sure, the importance of these machinations and their impact on popular opinion should not be exaggerated. In fact, not everybody bemoaned Prussia's disregard for monarchical legitimacy. The liberal movement for the most part condoned, even welcomed, the departure of their erstwhile tormentors and hoped that the territorial aggrandizement of Prussia might become a stepping stone for the establishment of a unified, parliamentary nation-state, in which the bourgeoisie rather than the princes set the political agenda.³² Some progressives even dared openly question state builders' insistence on the historical bond between dynasties and their territorial domains. 'Hanoverians', cautioned Heinrich Albert Oppermann, a long-suffering victim of Guelph persecution, 'don't be fooled into believing that there exists a glorious past which forbids a submission to Prussia. As Hanoverians we don't have such a thing. ... I hate the word 'ancestral' [*angestammt*]; it reminds me of livestock [*Stammvieh*].'³³ Liberal reactions to Prussia's treatment of the main claimant to the Schleswig and Holstein throne, Duke Friedrich (VIII), threw the demystification of monarchy into equally stark relief. Although the lower chamber of the Prussian parliament and the National Association passed motions in 1863/4 reaffirming their commitment to the duke's claims on account of his strong liberal leanings, support from this corner began to flag once Prussian *raison d'état* had gained the upper hand in Germany, even if Schleswig-Holsteiners like the historian Theodor Mommsen continued to decry Bismarckian injustice. In other words, the majority of liberals were prepared to sacrifice the Augustenburgs and their hapless cohorts to the 'wrong man with the right ideas' where the parochialism of small dynastic states clashed with the interests of the national collective.³⁴

Monarchical Legitimacy and the Long Reach of the Royal International

Despite or perhaps *because of* the surging strength of bourgeois liberalism, German constitutional theory assigned central importance to the notion that sovereignty in the emerging Reich rested foremost with the princes. According to this reading of imperial politics, national culture emanated less from shared cultural traits than from a federal contract between twenty-two monarchs, three free cities and the *Reichsland* Alsace-Lorraine. The way Bismarck saw it, the constitution of the Second Empire was in effect an ‘interstate treaty’; consequently he insisted that ‘if parties to this contract unanimously decide to withdraw, the latter cease to exist’. Although the chancellor’s position that national sovereignty derived from the states encountered resistance from defenders of imperial supremacy, the related juridical premise that the *pouvoir constituant* in the state issued from the monarchy had been widely accepted across Europe ever since Louis XVIII’s *Charte constitutionnelle* of 1814.³⁵ Aside from considerations of constitutional practice, the kind of ‘monarchical nationalism’ favoured by Bismarck or, a generation later, by the historians Friedrich Meinecke and Otto Hintze also served a none-too-subtle psychological purpose. To learn patriotism, the founder of the *Reich* declared in his memoirs, Germans needed states headed by ‘a prince on whom their loyalty can be focused’ to prevent them from falling ‘prey to nations who are more tightly forged together’.³⁶

In the final analysis such appeals to established attachments cloaked Prussian leaders’ dependence on the cooperation of other monarchs lest the new nation-state be popularly perceived as a vehicle of Prussian domination. For instance, one of the reasons why Berlin agreed to restore occupied Saxony to King Johann following the end of the German War was that they did not want to raise anti-Prussian feelings higher than they already were.³⁷ The reactionary chief minister of the grand duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt, Reinhard von Dalwigk, underlined the degree of legitimist mistrust by stating defiantly that if he ever saw his master being deprived of his sovereignty, he would rather turn republican than become a ‘second-class Prussian’.³⁸ Even senior civil servants and fellow monarchs, who outwardly accepted or at least condoned the outcome of the German War, could be heard grumbling that Bismarck had taken the pursuit of Prussian *raison d’état* too far and that something needed to be done to reverse

this development. 'Perhaps it served me quite well and it certainly benefited the royal service', the Prussian military envoy at the court of St Petersburg, General Hans Lothar von Schweinitz, later confessed, 'that I was kept in the dark about the precise moves of Berlin's decision-makers because as an officer and gentleman I would not have been able to defend them'. He and his close political ally Prince Heinrich VII of Reuß would dedicate the rest of their diplomatic careers as ambassadors in Vienna and St Petersburg respectively to repairing the damage that the principle of monarchical legitimacy had suffered.³⁹

Such conservative efforts to shore up monarchical solidarity were not misplaced. Fearful that the king of Hanover and elector of Hesse-Kassel's fate could all too easily become their own, both Grand Duke Friedrich Wilhelm of Mecklenburg-Strelitz and Prince Heinrich XXII of Reuß (older branch) expressed their protest by appointing officials from states once aligned against Prussia, like the former Hanoverian cabinet member Wilhelm Freiherr von Hammerstein-Loxten, who served as Mecklenburg-Strelitz's chief minister from 1868 until his death in 1872. Other Hanoverians found a home at the Saxon court and in the army, where they could continue to cultivate their allegiance to the Guelphs to some degree.⁴⁰

In an objective sense the anti-Prussian jibes of middling and minor potentates could make little difference to the distribution of power in the Reich. The Hohenzollern emperor-kings de facto remained the only monarchs to exercise full political sovereignty.⁴¹ Furthermore, owing to the demographic, military and administrative preponderance of Prussia, the other princes were left with limited means to challenge the imperial executive. Even if the constitution gave the non-Prussian monarchies a legislative veto in the Federal Council, Frank Lorenz Müller's verdict is no doubt correct: the creation of the Reich marked 'a fundamental shift from a federation of states (*Staatenbund*) to a Prussian-dominated federal state (*Bundesstaat*)'.⁴²

Still, the residual clout of the German monarchs was considerable, largely because of their familial connections to dynasties abroad. Johannes Paulmann has spoken in this context of a 'Royal International' held together by familial ties, corporate social identity and a shared concern for collective security.⁴³ For much of the nineteenth century this august club occupied a subsidiary sphere of international politics that reacted sensitively to seismic shifts in the balance of power, as the Prussian government discovered in its

dealings with the dethroned dynasties after the German War. After all, the duke of Nassau was linked to the Dutch House of Orange and remained in the line of succession to the throne of Luxembourg, while Georg V was a close relative of the British royal family and stood to inherit the duchy of Brunswick. Queen Victoria of England was very conscious of her German ancestry and liked to emphasize how changes in the status of one branch of her extended family impacted on the prestige of the others. In this spirit she reminded her daughter the Prussian crown princess Victoria,

the poor King [Georg V] represents, in the male line, our family, and the feeling here would be greatly roused against the King of P[russia] if poor King George and his family, after being despoiled of their own lawful possessions, were left in poverty and in a position not befitting to their rank and near relationship to our family.⁴⁴

The queen's letter reflected the ambivalent nature of royal diplomacy, which relied on the symbolic capital of the Royal International but acted independently of, and sometimes in opposition to, diplomatic channels of communication. Victoria knew she could not rely on the British government to enforce her demands, for both the Whigs and the Conservatives maintained neutrality towards the belligerents of the German War.⁴⁵ It is indicative of the ill-defined boundaries between royal and official diplomacy that Whitehall nevertheless heeded her semi-private request to intercede on her cousin's behalf. The drawn-out negotiations that followed between Bismarck and Georg V underscored the malleability of the distinction in matters pertaining to the monarchical interest. While the British ambassador in Berlin, Lord Augustus Loftus, somewhat disingenuously insisted,

the interest evinced by Her Majesty's Government in this question, independently of the fact of the King's being nearly related to the Royal Family of England, was dictated by a wish to render mutual service to both His Majesty [the King of Prussia] and to the King of Hanover,

the Prussian chief minister opted for the alternative tactic of wilfully ignoring the duality of public and private monarchical agency.⁴⁶ As he put it in an internal memorandum, no matter the material cost, peace treaties with the deposed princes were valuable because of the anticipated positive 'impression in Europe overall'.⁴⁷ Strikingly, like

Queen Victoria before him, Bismarck rhetorically enlisted here the plebiscitary aid of public opinion as a cipher for the will of the Royal International.

The diffuse yet palpable authority of this imagined community could be felt where it was absent, as a comparison of the compensation offered to ex-monarchs in the 1860s and after the First World War bears out. The victims of the Italian Risorgimento and German national unification, being connected to a wide network of royalty abroad, could expect generous terms. Grand Duke Ferdinand IV of Tuscany had his confiscated property returned to him upon the formal renunciation of his claims in favour of Piedmont.⁴⁸ Georg V of Hanover, the elector of Hesse-Kassel and the duke of Nassau were luckier still because they did not even have to abdicate to receive financial remuneration for their troubles.⁴⁹ Bereft of the support of powerful peers, the abdicated German princes could not count on such courtesy after 1918 and were fortunate that the electorate voted to compensate them at all.⁵⁰ Rather than negating the sway of the Royal International, the Prussian government's decision to repudiate its settlement with Georg V in March 1868 in fact served to suggest the opposite, as the Prussian minister-president and his allies in the *Landtag* justified the sequestration of Guelph assets and the conversion of the dividends into Bismarck's personal slush fund as punishment for the anti-Prussian machinations of Guelph legitimists in Europe.⁵¹

While the sequestration may have restricted the cash flow of the Guelphs, it did not silence Bismarck's detractors. Georg V and his son Ernst August remained a thorn in the Prussian government's side because they enjoyed the backing of a vocal independence movement in Hanover as well as the patronage of powerful relatives abroad.⁵² The Guelph-Hohenzollern antagonism came to a head in 1878 when the exiled king died and Ernst August wedded King Christian IX of Denmark's youngest daughter, Thyra. The timing of these events was momentous, for they added to the volatile atmosphere in which the Congress of Berlin and the realignment of German party politics during what has become known as the 'second founding of the Reich' took place that year. If the participation of the Prince of Wales and the French army in Georg V's funeral cortege at Paris merely perturbed the German government, Ernst August's declaration to all German sovereigns and free cities that he was assuming all the rights and titles which had belonged to his father was seen as an open provocation.⁵³ The notification touched a raw nerve because of the unresolved question

of whether the Guelphs would be able to claim the duchy of Brunswick upon the death of their childless relative, as was their dynastic right, or whether their unresolved dispute with Prussia barred them from the line of succession. While Queen Victoria of England, Georg V's cousin and the executrix of his will, was still negotiating the finer points of this constitutional problem, the duke of Cumberland (as Ernst August was styled upon his father's death) announced that he had eloped with Princess Thyra on 21 December.

The union of the two houses complicated an already convoluted situation. Danish-German relations had been strained since the two Schleswig Wars of 1848 and 1863/4 and the Danish royal family could boast close links to some of Europe's leading royal families. In fact, the duke of Cumberland's new brothers-in-law were none other than the Prince of Wales, the heir to the Russian throne and King George of Greece. Christian IX's bestowal of Danish orders on a delegation of Guelph loyalists delivered Bismarck a handy pretext to take a hard stance against what he deemed an emerging coalition among Prussia-Germany's domestic and international enemies. He promptly recalled the German ambassador from Copenhagen for the duration of the festivities and, to further humiliate the Danish king, chose this moment to announce that Austria and Prussia had reached an understanding concerning the abrogation of Article 5 in their 1866 peace treaty, which called for a plebiscite in northern Schleswig at some point to learn if the local population desired to remain with Prussia or to be united with Denmark.⁵⁴

The extreme politicization of the Cumberland wedding despite its essentially private character highlighted one of the central dilemmas of royal diplomacy, namely, on the one hand, monarchs' role as national figureheads with responsibilities towards their government and subjects and, on the other hand, their cosmopolitan affinities with kinsfolk in the rest of Europe. The Hohenzollerns were no exception because the 'Guelph problem' confronted certain family members with awkward choices that were not entirely unlike the predicament Christian IX had manoeuvred himself into. The German crown prince and his English wife, a Guelph on her mother's side, found themselves caught between Bismarck's refusal to make major concessions while Ernst August maintained his claim to Hanover and Queen Victoria's determination to save the duchy for the Guelphs in order to 'prevent the absorption of our family Heritage of which we are all justly proud, by Prussia'.⁵⁵ Since Crown Princess Victoria's hybrid

national allegiances and what amounted to spying for Queen Victoria at the Berlin court retarded her identification with the Hohenzollerns, she was emotionally unfit to defend her adoptive country's policies, all the more so given Bismarck's deep distrust of her liberal sympathies and foreign background.⁵⁶ Although the crown princess made genuine attempts to speak up for the German point of view, as numerous letters to her mother and the Prince of Wales bear witness, she eventually broke down. When she was confronted by the private secretary of the Prince of Wales, she admitted to his great surprise, he recorded,

almost all the charges which one after another I brought against the Prussian Govt., and she could only reply that her position was a very difficult one, that she had no power whatever, and that she was openly accused of unpatriotic sentiments whenever she ventured to express disapproval of what was being done.⁵⁷

Torn between his loyalty to the government and the wish to conciliate, the crown prince was also prone to major mood swings. Only a few weeks after sending a congratulatory note to Christian IX on the occasion of the duke of Cumberland and Thyra's engagement, he launched into an 'explosive tirade' when the British ambassador, Lord Odo Russell, alluded to the reception of the Hanoverian delegation in Copenhagen. The tone of the outburst 'conformed so little to his usually moderate and benevolent language', Russell told his French colleague, that it 'struck the interlocutor as being out of character'.⁵⁸ The outburst reflected the failure of the crown prince and his wife to live up to the conflicting expectations set in them, with the result that all their unfocused intervention achieved was to reveal their lack of real influence. In private Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm fumed that the chancellor's decision not to consult him on the deal with Austria discredited him in the eyes of his European relatives.⁵⁹ The unfolding of this human drama behind the scenes of European high politics was not lost on foreign diplomats, who reported to their superiors that the royal couple was at best out of step with current events and at worst let themselves be duped by Bismarck.⁶⁰ Viewed together, the reports showed Friedrich Wilhelm at his weakest, a far cry from the image of the imaginative operator painted in recent historiography and the contemporary ideal of 'hegemonic masculinity', which demanded self-control and strength.⁶¹ Thus, rather than representing an unequivocal asset, royal diplomacy had the potential to erode the symbolic capital of its very practitioners. Moreover, from the vantage point of the

German state, the competition of royals with the foreign office obstructed the work of regular diplomacy, which carried the risk, as Bismarck tersely put it, of ‘making knotty problems even more twisted’.⁶²

The events of 1878 marked a period of transition in both the Hohenzollern court’s relations with the dynasties disaffected since the German War and monarchical self-representation more generally. As Paulmann has shown, royal houses were increasingly defined less by their internationalism and more by how they embodied the collective self-image of their nations and merged the separate sphere of monarchy with the state proper.⁶³ Royal pageantry and meetings between sovereigns facilitated this process by symbolically enacting international relations for the benefit of attending spectators and, with the help of the mass media, the wider public sphere. However, the fusion of national and dynastic discourses came at a heavy price: perceived personal antagonisms between monarchs were liable to have a greater impact on national politics and, by extension, international relations than before.

The aftermath of a renewed foray by the Prince of Wales in June 1888 to effect a Guelph restoration in Hanover exemplified the shift in communication that had taken place since the Cumberland wedding ten years earlier. At the funeral of the German emperor Friedrich III, the former Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, the Prince of Wales enquired with the German secretary of state for foreign affairs, Count Herbert von Bismarck, whether the government intended to return Hanover to the Guelphs and Alsace-Lorraine to France, as had purportedly been the wish of the deceased monarch.⁶⁴ Soon different rumours started circulating about what was said and by whom, but the upshot of the reports that reached the ears of Kaiser Wilhelm II was in any case to set the young monarch against his uncle. Matters were not helped by the fact that when the kaiser embarked on his first state visits to the Baltic region a few weeks later, Queen Louise of Denmark, a Hesse-Kassel princess by birth, and her daughter Tsarina Maria Feodorovna broached the same subject. By way of rejoinder, he made a speech at Frankfurt an der Oder on the anniversary of the battles of Thionville and Mars la Tour that heralded a key phase in the deterioration of Anglo-German dynastic relations.⁶⁵ ‘There are people’, thundered Wilhelm,

who have the impudence to maintain that my father wanted to give up what he, together with the late Prince [Friedrich Karl], won on the field of battle. ... I believe that every one of us ... in the

army knows that there can be only one opinion on this matter, namely, that we would rather see the whole of our eighteen army corps and our forty-two million inhabitants perish on the battlefield than surrender a single stone of what my father and Prince Friedrich Karl gained.

After the speech he was heard saying loudly to a companion, 'I hope my uncle the Prince of Wales will understand that!!'⁶⁶

Despite the obvious use of hyperbole for dramatic effect, the kaiser's recourse to the language of total war bore powerful testimony to the way in which unresolved dynastic grievances intersected with German nationalism and international relations, all under the attentive gaze of the international press. As on previous occasions, interventions by members of Europe's royal houses had failed to achieve their objective and, worse, had humiliated the supplicants themselves in a very public fashion. The British liberal periodical *Truth*, for instance, reported that the Prince of Wales' enquiry had prompted the kaiser to discourage the Prussian prince Friedrich Leopold from taking an English wife and tellingly concluded, 'This will be a blow to our Royal Family, as their "new generation" have so far been singularly unfortunate in their wooings.'⁶⁷ If the ability of royals to bring about political change head-on was therefore quite limited, their lack of impact stood in inverse proportion to the reach of their 'soft power'.

Royal Diplomacy in a Different Key

Beside constitutional prerogatives and the discourse of divine kingship, which in a Weberian sense formed the legal and custom-bound foundations of royal legitimacy, monarchs also possessed what the American political scientist Joseph S. Nye has termed soft power. Instead of relying on coercion to enforce their will, leaders can use persuasion to make others agree with their views, though such soft power is difficult to wield because its effects depend heavily on acceptance by the receiving audiences and may take years to become visible.⁶⁸ To generate trust, Clifford Geertz posits in his influential ruminations on kingship, monarchs must 'take symbolic possession of their realm' and affirm their 'connection with transcendent things by stamping a territory with ritual signs of dominance'.⁶⁹ This important insight begs the question of what is to be done when two or more rulers assert claims to the same territory. Recent comparative work by Torsten Riotte on the Guelph movement and the Bourbon *Légitimistes* in France has shown that in the nineteenth century exile did not

preclude dethroned monarchs from competing with the new incumbents for the allegiance of the people. They did so via social networks, political parties and clubs that survived for many decades.⁷⁰ The next part of the article will consider how the Hohenzollerns ‘spread their own scent’, to borrow Geertz’s metaphor, and supplemented political concessions to their dynastic detractors with the use of soft power.⁷¹

In the new Prussian provinces, winning the love of the governed for the sovereign (*Untertanenliebe*) was a multi-stage process after 1866. In the first instance, the government needed to secure the release of officials and soldiers from their oath of allegiance to the exiled monarchs and negotiate the amalgamation of existing institutions such as the civil service, the church, parliament and other public bodies with the Prussian state. Most of the reforms were accomplished within a year, the so-called *Diktaturjahr*. Some measures were imposed from above, as the moniker implies, but others involved extensive consultations of local notables. Overall the administrative incorporation of the annexed provinces proceeded smoothly, even if overt compliance did not necessarily signify love for Prussia or its rulers.⁷² In fact, reports and local protests pointed to continuing emotional detachment among large segments of the population, either because the Hohenzollerns were still an unknown quantity or because legitimists decried them as usurpers.⁷³ For that reason King Wilhelm and Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm waited almost two years to visit the lion’s den of anti-Prussian agitation, the city of Hannover. The crown prince showed much surprise at the provincial governor’s assurance that the crowds lining the streets were in fact genuine Hanoverians and confided to his diary at the end of the visit ‘Thank God it is over.’⁷⁴

Friedrich Wilhelm’s insecurity stemmed from the contractual understanding of *Untertanenliebe* that prevailed in the political discourse of constitutional monarchies by the second half of the nineteenth century.⁷⁵ Rather than legitimizing the exercise of power from the top down, royal pomp and circumstance had come to rely on an implicit dialogue with the audience, which exposed monarchs to the judgement of their subjects, for better or worse. The need to impress the public acquired a heightened urgency in the new provinces because even though Friedrich Wilhelm had little patience for nostalgic particularists, his wife, a self-proclaimed liberal and strong influence on him, objected to the annexations on the grounds of their having been carried out without

the express wish of the people. She advocated German unification through moral conquest and wished for her husband to be seen as a champion of justice by the general public.⁷⁶ Evidence suggests that the appropriation of other dynasties' symbolic capital became a favoured means to raise the Hohenzollern dynasty's moral stock. Viewed through a Bourdieusian lens, symbolic capital denotes the capacity of individuals or institutions to impose classifications on the world and thereby shape the perceptions of their environment. Credibility hinges on the societal standing of the actors in question, whose authority corresponds with the credit they have accumulated in previous struggles to exercise symbolic power.⁷⁷ Applied to the situation in Germany, monarchs had managed to amass a considerable wealth of symbolic capital in the five decades of intensive state-building that preceded the German War. From the Hohenzollern vantage point it made logical sense to tap this resource, either by drawing public attention to historic kinship ties or by pursuing intermarriages where these bonds were lacking or by 'commandeering' the heritage of their rivals outright.

Take the example of Hesse-Kassel's dynasty, the House of Brabant. Owing to a shared Calvinist background there existed close affinities with the Prussian royal family, which explains in part why the last elector counted more Prussian than Hessian ancestors.⁷⁸ Wilhelm made a point of honouring this familial bond by granting his cousin's wish to be buried in Kassel in 1875 and giving servants of the former elector, who had been convicted *in absentia* of crimes against Prussia, permission to accompany their master's body. The kaiser even visited the tomb at least once.⁷⁹ Such demonstrations of royal clemency towards a vanquished enemy fell on fertile soil because the elector's successor as head of the Brabant family, Landgrave Friedrich Wilhelm, was already married to a Hohenzollern princess and was prepared to renounce his rights to the Hessian crown in return for generous compensation. In 1893 his son Friedrich Karl sealed the dynastic contract by tying the knot with Kaiser Wilhelm II's youngest sister, Princess Margarethe. Perhaps the ultimate tribute to the assimilation of Hesse-Kassel's dynastic traditions into Prussia's was the rehabilitation of Elector Friedrich Wilhelm's memory in the army of all places, which gave officers' messes in Hessian-recruited regiments permission to observe his birthday and in 1899 officially transferred the traditions of the defunct *kurhessisch* military forces onto these units.⁸⁰

The Prussian court was prepared to bend dynastic etiquette far to accelerate this process of fusion. In 1881, the future Kaiser Wilhelm II married Duke Friedrich VIII's daughter Auguste Viktoria, despite doubts concerning the royal status (*Ebenbürtigkeit*) of the Augustenburg lineage.⁸¹ A *mésalliance* might have damaged the international reputation of the imperial family under other circumstances, but in this case the negative fallout was more than offset by Friedrich VIII's agreement to secretly renounce his claim on the two duchies in return.⁸² That both sides were prepared to make such major concessions points to the propagandistic value of dynastic reconciliation, as can also be gauged from the following pathos-laden speech Wilhelm II gave in Kiel four years after the betrothal of his son August Wilhelm to Princess Alexandra Viktoria, a member of the extended Schleswig-Holstein clan, in 1911:

The entry of a lovely daughter from the House of Glücksburg into my House has forged fresh bonds between Schleswig-Holstein and Me on top of the already existing ones owing to My marriage to Her Majesty the Empress. This serene woman, who is the first lady in our country by virtue of her being the Prussian queen and German empress, is, I am convinced, proudly viewed as a compatriot by all Schleswig-Holsteiners.

The quotation underscores the extent to which Hohenzollern marriage strategies and monarchical nationalism complemented each other: according to the logic of the kaiser's speech, the two Schleswig-Holstein princesses remained true to their ancestral *Heimat* precisely because they had agreed to let bygones be bygones when they became the wives of the most powerful royal family in Germany, in whose reflected glory all Schleswig-Holsteiners could now bask and from whom they could expect material help whenever 'emergencies needed ameliorating'.⁸³

A further variant of the transmutation of dynastic conflict into a narrative of synergy came to the fore in the dealings of the Hohenzollerns with the Guelphs and the House of Nassau. More so than in the other cases, the duke of Cumberland and Duke Adolph entertained a genuine hope of returning to the select circle of sovereign princes one day, yet they elected to stay clear of the Prussian court, in part to affirm their protest against the perceived iniquities they had suffered and in part because their candidature for the thrones of Brunswick and Luxembourg kept their future in an animated state of suspension. To bridge the chasm, the Hohenzollerns launched a series of good-will initiatives from the mid-1880s onwards to soften the resistance of the two exiled

monarchs. Three years before his untimely death, Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm approached Duke Adolph through the good offices of their common relative, Grand Duke Friedrich I of Baden, to inform him that the German government would raise no objections to his succession in the grand duchy of Luxembourg. Why the crown prince and his son, Kaiser Wilhelm II, extended this guarantee has been a matter of debate. One historian of the Nassauvian succession in Luxembourg has suggested that the Hohenzollerns were hoping to get German-Luxembourg relations off to a fresh start in order to pave the way for closer relations.⁸⁴ Whatever the truth, German official newspapers readily reported on the kaiser's charm offensive and its effects, commenting that 'imperial honours' were heaped upon the new grand duke during a personal meeting in 1891 and that the pair afterwards parlayed in an 'unforced' manner.⁸⁵ The following year the Guelphs became the beneficiaries of even greater largesse when Chancellor Leo von Caprivi decided to return their sequestered property because his predecessor's notorious slush fund, the *Welfenfonds*, was starting to cause the government undue legal embarrassment.⁸⁶ The climax of reconciliation was reached with the highly publicized wedding of the duke of Cumberland's son and Wilhelm II's only daughter, in 1913, which cleared the path at last for the installation of a Guelph on the throne of Brunswick after a thirty-year regency.⁸⁷

Although the *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung* legitimately objected that imperial pressure on the Federal Council to confirm Prince Ernst August as duke of Brunswick even without his father's renunciation of the Hanoverian crown flew in the face of all earlier resolutions, the newspaper was missing the larger point of the exercise.⁸⁸ The fiction that the *Kaiserreich* represented a federation of princes governing through the Federal Council had long given way to a kaiser-centred system of monarchy, which publically styled Wilhelm II the supreme arbiter of Germany's political fate. This power shift in the wake of Wilhelm II's 'personal regime' rendered inter-dynastic reconciliation hostage to the whims of the kaiser's mercurial personality, and much of that restless energy was channelled into what Isabel V. Hull has appropriately called a 'fixation upon symbolic, external detail'.⁸⁹

A chain of incidents at the turn of the century showcases this point well. During a visit to Hannover in September 1898 for the annual imperial army manoeuvres, the kaiser gave two evocative speeches which signalled a desire for better relations with the

Guelph side of his family. Taking advantage of recent Anglo-German talks about a possible alliance, he first selected the pregnant backdrop of the Waterloo Column to emphasize Britain and Germany's close historical association by congratulating Queen Victoria, 'who as colonel-in-chief of a German regiment also belongs to the [German] army', on the victory of the British forces at Omdurman. In a second speech before Hanoverian dignitaries in the *Ständehaus* he compared Hanover's 'sorely tested' former queen, Marie, to the Prussian patriotic icon Queen Luise.⁹⁰ Since he genuinely believed that his symbolic statements were sufficiently powerful to vanquish the legitimist opposition, he felt personally rejected by the news that the Guelph press continued to lambast his government and that sympathizers had presented a sword to the duke of Cumberland's son to be used against Prussia, and he hit back hard. 'That this august lady [Marie] and the House of Guelph in no way acknowledged the obligingness [of the kaiser] struck His Majesty as rather peculiar', the imperial cabinet was informed. 'That the Guelph Party should react with the same impudence', the missive continued, 'is unacceptable.'⁹¹ The Prussian interior ministry promptly cobbled together a grandiose plan to combat the Guelph movement, which called for concerted action by all government agencies, the creation of a special police task force, more stringent background checks on officials, the mobilization of the Conservative Party and patriotic associations, and redoubled efforts to strengthen 'Prussian state consciousness' via schools, public libraries, newspaper propaganda and strategic agricultural subsidies.⁹² Although the interior minister concurred with the Hanoverian provincial governor's assessment that the Guelph Party in the *Reichstag* was facing decline even without outside interference, the authorities implemented surveillance anyway, as the compilation of secret dossiers on suspected Guelph sympathizers by the office of the governor bear out.⁹³ While Wilhelm II's ambitious agenda in certain respects resembled the tried and tested model of Bavarian 'nation-building' initiated by King Maximilian II after the revolution of 1848, the scope of the kaiser's plans was potentially more far-reaching, thanks to advances in the quality of mass education and the proliferation of government-sponsored libraries since the 1860s.⁹⁴

One of Wilhelm II's most prominent character traits, Thomas Kohut has shown in his sharp psycho-historical portrait of the last kaiser, was an abiding desire to please the public. Even at his most imperious, he exercised royal soft power to make himself a cultural intermediary between 'many different Germanies which were only united in the

national figure of the Kaiser'.⁹⁵ Only two months after his rant against the Guelphs, for instance, in January 1899 he issued the above-mentioned 'decree on tradition', whose grafting of the defunct Hanoverian and Hessian army's heritage onto Prussian regiments constituted an apparent bid to 'contribute to the bridging of differences' between provincial, Prussian and national identities.⁹⁶ A symbolic act with similar intent was the dispatch of the German crown prince to Hannover in July 1910, on the centenary of Queen Luise's death, on which occasion Wilhelm II's heir presented the city fathers with a copy of Johann Gottfried Schadow's famous double statue of the dead female monarch and her sister Friederike. The meaning of the gift was easy to divine. Depicting the ancestors of the kaiser and the duke of Cumberland in a warm embrace, the 'union of the two sisters ... epitomizes the close connection, the fusion of their states, which was desired by fate and sanctioned by geographical location', as one pamphleteer put it. By way of rejoinder to the perpetual cry of the Guelphs that the Hohenzollerns were not Hanover's legitimate sovereigns, the same author pointed out that no member of the Guelph family had so far deemed it necessary to erect a monument to their kinswoman Frederica and that it was therefore up to the kaiser to confer his 'sovereign grace' (*landesväterliche Huld*) on her.⁹⁷

The imperial decree of 1899 and the appropriation of Frederica's memory to legitimize Prussian-state-building exemplify the pervasiveness of 'mass-produced inventions' in the *Kaiserreich*, which conjured a sense of historical continuity and celebrated experiences that linked East Elbian Prussia to the rest of Germany. Eric Hobsbawm and other historians since have identified Wilhelm II as one of the phenomenon's prime instigators.⁹⁸ However, recent research has begun to offer a salutary corrective by questioning this top-down conceptualization of royal propaganda. Rather than being forced down the throats of an unsuspecting public, more often than not strategies of monarchical self-representation followed the lead of self-confident urban elites and bourgeois entrepreneurs who hoped to gain social prestige, emotional satisfaction and commercial rewards from their association with the cult of monarchy.⁹⁹ Hosting royalty became a particularly effective vehicle for honouring not only the exalted guest but also municipalities' own achievements and wealth. Wilhelm II's first visit to Hannover as emperor, in 1889, was a case in point. The magistrate set aside the vast sum of 84,000 Reichsmark so that sixty architects, sculptors and painters could suitably impress the German sovereign.¹⁰⁰ The visual symbolism of the artwork threw into relief how much

licence these agents of municipal pride claimed in the dissemination of Hohenzollern invented traditions. On the *Leinestraße* a double-arched ‘triumphal gate’ with a large statue of Queen Luise at its centre and a banner reading ‘Welcome to the place of my birth’ awaited the kaiser.¹⁰¹ The selection of Queen Luise was significant, for Wilhelm II’s predecessors had purposefully allowed themselves to be connected with this popular idol of feminine virtue in order to soften the martial image of the Hohenzollern monarchy, but Hannover’s city fathers set their own accents by stressing the Hanoverian origins of the Prussian queen.¹⁰² It spoke to the authority of these local power brokers that the kaiser’s gift to the municipality some twenty years later, which depicted Luise and her sister in their youth, still adhered to the discursive shift established by the magistrate during Wilhelm II’s first visit.

The formative hand of provincial elites in the propagation of monarchical culture and, by extension, dynastic reconciliation likewise became very evident in the execution of the Nassavian State Monument: the *spiritus rector* of the project, the mayor of Biebrich, retired officers, officials and professionals requested Wilhelm II and the grand duke of Luxembourg’s endorsement after the decision to erect a memorial had already been made. Despite the sponsors’ gratitude to the dukes of Nassau for having created the eponymous region they inhabited, the actual purpose of the monument related only indirectly to the institution of monarchy itself, as it was above all concerned with the promotion of the local tourist industry, the elevation of Nassau’s regional profile in Germany and the strengthening of conservative consciousness to rein in the burgeoning influence of socialism in local politics.¹⁰³

The involvement of businessmen, doctors, architects and other members of the ‘respectable classes’ in charitable projects of this nature served one further important function, namely to confirm their status within the bourgeoisie. For much of the nineteenth century, public cultural institutions throughout western Europe—whether theatres, concert houses, art galleries or museums—depended primarily on private rather than state initiative.¹⁰⁴ Counter-intuitively, it was precisely the vibrancy of civil society which facilitated the popularization of monarchy and a grass-roots interest in dynastic affinities and enmities. As with monument projects and municipal festivities for the kaiser, philanthropists’ collaboration with the Hohenzollern court and monarchs in exile was not free from ulterior motives, since it could be financially rewarding to

play off one side against the other. This was the route chosen by the steering committee of one of Wilhelmine Germany's premier *Heimat* museums, the Fatherland Museum in Celle.¹⁰⁵

Like most such organizations, the Fatherland Museum rose to prominence on the coattails of 1890s reform movements, which aimed to preserve folklore, art and cultural heritage from the ravages of industrialization. The Celle Museum Association, led by the industrialist Wilhelm Bomann, concentrated its energies on Hanoverian military, farming and guild traditions. Since the availability of public and private sources of funding proved insufficient to pay for the housing of the growing artefact collection, the members of the Museum Association hit upon the idea of using their social connections to secure donations from both the duke of Cumberland and the kaiser. Having received assurances that the museum displays were not offensive to Guelph sensibilities and also buoyed by the victory of the local Guelph Party candidate in the *Reichstag* elections of 1898, the duke readily parted with 45,000 Reichsmark for the construction of a new venue, which made his the single largest donation thus far. The duke's generosity embarrassed the Prussian authorities because when the Museum Association asked Wilhelm II to donate a monumental battle mural for a 'hall of honour' dedicated to the Hanoverian army, the district president advised that a refusal would add welcome grist to the Guelph propaganda mill. After much internal debate the kaiser granted the request and appointed the well-known military painter Carl Röchling to execute a painting of the battle of the Góhrde (1813).¹⁰⁶ The motif of Hanoverian and Prussian soldiers fighting shoulder to shoulder neutralized the museum's instrumentalization for one-sided partisan causes and hence made it politically safe for everybody, including Prussian officers, envoys from the duke of Cumberland, school classes, Lutheran confirmees and—above all—the kaiser to visit.¹⁰⁷ The genesis of the Fatherland Museum accentuated semiotic ambiguities in monarchical soft power, which both the Hohenzollerns and Guelphs wielded with enough suppleness by the 1910s to allow for a degree of synergy while at the same time giving philanthropists room to leave their own mark on the process of dynastic reconciliation. Tellingly the main winner to emerge from this quest was the self-confident bourgeois entrepreneur Bomann, who netted several high medals and the coveted title of 'professor' for his efforts.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

Shortly after Ernst August and Viktoria Luise's accession to the ducal throne of Brunswick *The Economist* published a short report which reflected on the significance of this event. It concluded that

no possible danger to Prussia can result from the concession, and the Government is to be congratulated in going far to remove a cause of dissatisfaction which, although not so acute, stood at least in the same category as the three great questions of North Schleswig, Poland, and Alsace-Lorraine.¹⁰⁹

This statement bears powerful witness to the troublesome legacy that the German War bequeathed to the *Kaiserreich*. As this article has endeavoured to show, the Hohenzollern court's decision to put *raison d'état* above dynastic solidarity in 1866 alienated it from influential sections of the Royal International and unsettled proponents of a dynasty-centred, federal conception of German nationhood, making the repercussions felt nationally and internationally. Where the grievances of legitimists intersected with other contentious issues, such as the twists and turns of Bismarckian foreign policy and Wilhelm II's ambition to establish his 'personal regime', they had the potential to disrupt not only the normal functioning of government but also the lives of the Hohenzollerns themselves. The helpless response of Crown Prince Friedrich and his English wife to the cross-pressures of German diplomacy and the interventions of their foreign relatives on behalf of the Guelphs during the Danish-German crisis of 1878 was a notable example which underscored the inability or unwillingness of European states to clearly delineate dynastic from national interests. While this finding *prima facie* supports the prevailing view that monarchs transformed themselves into national figureheads in the course of the nineteenth century, their justificatory use of 'national public opinion' to promote the cause of dynastic reconciliation reminds us that the remoulding of the monarchy in the image of nationalism was far from unidirectional.¹¹⁰

This discursive conversation between the Hohenzollerns and their subjects was in no small part sustained by the enterprising spirit of local elites. The mayor of Biebrich, the Celle industrialist Bomann and the magistrate of Hannover were free agents who

subscribed to a 'language of loyalty' (to borrow Laurence Cole's analogue from Habsburg history) not out of subservience but rather because they expected tangible gains from their association with the monarchy.¹¹¹ The sophisticated deployment of historical references in their dialogue with the Hohenzollerns, Guelphs and House of Nassau at the same time sheds revealing light on the extent to which these elites had internalized the monarchical nationalism promoted by particularist state builders in the first half of the nineteenth century and enshrined by the constitution of the *Kaiserreich*. Much of this argument falls in line with Abigail Green's and Eva Giloi's scholarship on political regionalism and the material culture of monarchy in Germany, but this essay goes further since it contends that the Hohenzollerns—especially Wilhelm II—were more creative in their methods of monarchical self-legitimization than they have been given credit for. In contrast to the work of Giloi which posits that 'Hohenzollern dynastic anecdotes were emotionally accessible only within Prussia's core territories' because royal mythology tended to revolve too much around traditional heroes of Prusso-Brandenburgian history like the Great Elector, Frederick the Great and Queen Luise, to leave space 'for diversion into alternate political symbols', the case studies discussed above underscore the Prussian court's adroit appropriation of other dynasties' accomplishments and co-optation of the deposed royal houses to enhance their own symbolic capital.¹¹² It speaks to a 'remarkable consistency of political will from each generation to the next' in the Hohenzollern family but also to the perceived seriousness of the fractures within the Royal International after 1866 that all three emperors kept chipping away at the dynastic antagonisms despite their very different personalities and the resulting recurrence of conflict between fathers and sons.¹¹³

Thus, although the victory of Prussian arms had been swift and decisive, the aftershocks of the German War were slow to abate, making monarchical state-building by way of state destruction an important site of contestation through which the *Kaiserreich's* crowned heads, related royals abroad and ordinary Germans negotiated the complex challenges posed by the unification of this heterogeneous nation-state in the heart of Europe.

Endnotes

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The author wishes to thank the participants of the panel ‘Fürstliche Verlierer? Europäische Monarch(i)en zwischen Niedergang und Behauptung im 19. Jahrhundert’ at the 50. *Historikertag* in Göttingen—especially Heidi Mehrkens—for their helpful suggestions in the first and middle phases of this essay’s gestation process. Further advice from the anonymous reviewers at *German History* and Stuart Carroll was instrumental in bringing the project to a successful conclusion.

1

‘Die Enthüllung des nassauischen Landesdenkmals’, *Wiesbadener Tagblatt*, 27 Oct. 1909, morning issue, pp. 3–4.

2

Throughout the article the form ‘Hanover’ indicates the territory and the form ‘Hannover’ the city.

3

Bismarck to the Crown Council, 15 Aug. 1866, in *Die Protokolle des Preußischen Staatsministeriums*, ed. Rainer Paetau, vol. 6/1 (Hildesheim, 2004), p. 255; Werner Eugen Mosse, *The European Powers and the German Question 1848–71 with Special Reference to England and Russia* (Cambridge, 1958), p. 247.

4

Lothar Gall, *Bismarck: The White Revolutionary*, 2 vols, trans. J. A. Underwood (London, 1986); Henry Kissinger, ‘The White Revolutionary: Reflections on Bismarck’, *Daedalus*, 97, 3 (1968), pp. 888–924.

5

Dieter Langewiesche, *Die Monarchie im Jahrhundert Europas: Selbstbehauptung durch Wandel im 19. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg, 2013), p. 5.

6

The literature on monarchical self-legitimization in the nineteenth-century has grown too extensive to list here individually. For a flavour of recent developments in Anglo-Saxon scholarship, see the project descriptions of ‘Heirs to the Throne’, <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/history/research/monarchies/> (accessed 28 July 2016); ‘Monarchy, Church and State’, <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/monarchy-church-state> (accessed 28 July 2016); Society for Court Studies, <http://www.courtstudies.org/> (accessed 28 July 2016); and Royal Studies Network, <http://www.royalstudiesnetwork.org/> (accessed 28 July 2016). For non-English contributions to this new stream of publications, see the bibliographical references on the ‘Heirs to the Throne’ website.

7

W. M. Spellman has aptly framed these questions: ‘How did a competitive, entrepreneurial and expansionist economic environment secure the endorsement and support of an institution whose age-old loci of support had come from those who dominated land and labour? And if innovation and the setting of precedent strengthened the West’s position relative to the other great civilizations after 1500, what

explains the retention of what in an increasingly democratic age might be termed a political anachronism; why was the Eurocentric world system led by hereditary monarchs? Spellman, *Monarchies 1000–2000* (London, 2001), p. 191. For stimulating examples of scholarship that has begun to answer these queries through structural comparisons, see Wolfgang Reinhard, *Geschichte der Staatsgewalt: eine vergleichende Verfassungsgeschichte Europas von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 1999), Jeroen Duindam, *Dynasties: A Global History of Power, 1300–1800* (Cambridge, 2016) and Yves-Marie Bercé (ed.), *Les monarchies* (Paris, 1997).

8

This term has been borrowed in modified form from Langewiesche, *Die Monarchie im Jahrhundert Europas*, p. 7.

9

Volker Sellin, *Gewalt und Legitimität: die europäische Monarchie im Zeitalter der Revolutionen* (Munich, 2011), p. 218.

10

Matthew Jefferies, *Contesting the German Empire, 1871–1918* (Malden, Mass., 2008), p. 89.

11

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Bismarck, memorandum concerning payments to King Georg and Duke Adolph of Nassau, 21 Nov. 1867, reprinted in *Die Gesammelten Werke*, ed. Friedrich Thimme, vol. 6a (Berlin, 1930), p. 133. In another memorandum, from 1878, Bismarck stated his motives in no uncertain terms: '[In 1867] we anticipated with some certainty a war with France [and] had to consider the possibility that Austria might renew her fight against us on that occasion; England and Russia's benevolence was therefore particularly important to us.' Memorandum concerning the sequestered Guelph Fund, 9 Nov. 1878, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (hereafter BAB), R43/1400, fo. 82.

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Article reprinted in the *Birmingham Daily Post*, 13 Sept. 1888, issue 9428, p. 4.

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Torsten Riotte, 'Der Monarch im Exil: Legitimus und Staatswerdung im 19. Jahrhundert' (unpublished Habilitationsschrift, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, 2013). On deposed monarchs, see Heidi Mehrkens, 'Rangieren auf dem Abstellgleis: Europas abgesetzte Herrscher 1830–1870', in Thomas Biskup and Martin Kohlrausch (eds), *Das Erbe der Monarchie: Nachwirkungen einer deutschen Institution seit 1918* (Frankfurt/Main and New York, 2008), pp. 37–58.

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Geertz, 'Centers, King, and Charisma', p. 153.

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For a synopsis, cf. Peter Baumgart (ed.), *Expansion und Integration: zur Eingliederung neugewonnener Gebiete in den preussischen Staat* (Cologne and Vienna, 1984); Schmitt, 'From Sovereign States to Prussian Provinces', pp. 24–56.

73

That compliance with the regulations of the Prussian regime did not necessarily imply acceptance of the new monarch is shown in a decree by the Lutheran district consistory of Hannover which gave pastors the option to substitute the generic but deliberately ambivalent term 'the authorities' (*die Obrigkeit*) for the name of the king in their church prayers. Decree to pastors, 8 Oct. 1866, Landeskirchliches Archiv Hannover, Bestand S8c. On popular attitudes more generally, see Heinzen, *Making Prussians, Raising Germans*.

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Heinrich Heffter, *Otto Fürst zu Stolberg-Wernigerode*, ed. Werner Pöls (Husum, 1980), pp. 363, 372; diary entry for 4 Aug. 1868 in *Kaiser Friedrich III.*, p. 131. See also Gerhard Schneider, 'Kaiserbesuche in Hannover 1868–1914' (unpublished manuscript), p. 1.

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Schönflug, *Die Heiraten der Hohenzollern*, p. 99.

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August Sach, ‘Friedrich VIII.’, *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 49 (Munich, 1904), pp. 33–4.

83

Speech given by Kaiser Wilhelm II at a dinner in honour of the province, 25 Aug. 1911, in *Die Reden Kaiser Wilhelms II*, ed. Bogdan Krieger, vol. 4 (Leipzig, n.d.), p. 262.

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Pierre Even, ‘Befürworter und Gegner der Thronerfolge Herzog Adolphs von Nassau in Luxemburg’, *Nassauische Annalen*, 101 (1990), p. 155. According to the kaiser’s confidant Count Alfred von Waldersee, Wilhelm II was concerned about French proclivities in Luxembourg and considered Adolph a possible ‘German’ counterweight. See Alfred von Waldersee, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1920) p. 14.

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Teltower Kreis-Blatt, 9 May 1891.

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See cabinet debates regarding the return of the *Welfenfonds* in BAB, R43/1407, fos. 82–5.

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Cf. Ute Daniel and Christian K. Frey (eds), *Die preußisch-welfische Hochzeit 1913: das dynastische Europa in seinem letzten Friedensjahr* (Braunschweig, 2016).

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Rheinisch-Westfälisch Zeitung, 17 May 1913, front page.

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Both speeches can be found in *Die Reden Kaiser Wilhelms II.*, vol. 1, pp. 107–8. On the diplomatic negotiations with Britain, see Harald Rosenbach, *Das Deutsche Reich, Grossbritannien und der Transvaal (1896–1902): Anfänge deutsch-britischer Entfremdung* (Göttingen, 1993), pp. 91–114.

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Instructions to the Prussian foreign (!) and interior ministries, 22 Nov. 1898, BAB, R43/1403, fos. 155–55r.

92

Interior minister to Chancellor von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, 27 Aug. 1899, BAB, R43/1403, fos. 139–54.

93

Thomas Ormond, *Richtermwürde und Regierungstreue: Dienstrecht, politische Betätigung und Disziplinierung der Richter in Preußen, Baden und Hessen 1866–1918* (Frankfurt/Main, 1994), p. 481.

94

Manfred Hanisch, *Für Fürst und Vaterland: Legitimitätsstiftung in Bayern zwischen Revolution 1848 und deutscher Einheit* (Munich, 1991), pp. 27–8, 406; Katharina Weigand, 'König Maximilian II.: Kultur und Wissenschaftspolitik im Dienst der bayerischen Eigenstaatlichkeit', in Sigmund Bonk and Peter Schmid (eds), *Königreich Bayern: Facetten bayerischer Geschichte 1806–1919* (Regensburg, 2006), pp. 75–94; Gerhard Hirschmann, *Das Haus Wittelsbach und Franken im 19. Jahrhundert* (Neustadt/Aisch, 1984), pp. 13–31. On the long arc of state-building practices in Germany, see Heinzen, *Making Prussians, Raising Germans*, esp. chaps 3 and 4.

95

Thomas Kohut, *Wilhelm II and the Germans: A Study in Leadership* (New York and Oxford, 1991), p. 159.

96

Interior minister to Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, 27 Aug. 1899, BAB, R43/1403, fo. 151r. Not coincidentally a circular issued two months later by the president of the Hanoverian Provincial Warrior Confederation stressed that obedience to the emperor was mere sophistry without a true commitment to the king of Prussia; see Major General Bock von Wülffingen to provincial military associations, 3 Mar. 1899, Niedersächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Hannover, Hann. 174 Zellerfeld, Nr 965, fo. 23.

97

Archivrat Jean Lulvès cited in Birte Förster, *Der Königin Luise-Mythos: Mediengeschichte des Idealbilds deutscher Weiblichkeit' 1860–1960* (Göttingen, 2011), p. 235.

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Eric Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870–1914', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 263–307. Cf. Michael A. Förster, *Kulturpolitik im Dienst der Legitimation: Oper, Theater und Volkslied als Mittel der Politik Kaiser Wilhelms II.* (Frankfurt/Main, 2009); Stephanie Kleiner, 'Der Kaiser als Ereignis: die Wiesbadener Kaiserfestspiele 1896–1914', in Rudolf Schlögl, Bernhard Giesen and Jürgen Osterhammel (eds), *Die Wirklichkeit der Symbole: Grundlagen der Kommunikation in historischen und gegenwärtigen Gesellschaften* (Constance, 2004), pp. 339–67.

99

Eva Giloi, *Monarchy, Myth, and Material Culture in Germany, 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2011).

100

Robert Philippsthal, *Zur Erinnerung an die Kaisertage in Hannover 12. bis 16. September 1889* (Hannover, 1889), p. 2.

101

Ibid., p. 24.

102

Giloi, *Monarchy, Myth, and Material Culture*, *passim*; Müller, *Our Fritz*, p. 137.

103

'Die Enthüllung des nassauischen Landesdenkmals', *Wiesbadener Tageblatt*, 26 Oct. 1909, evening issue, p. 4; Klaus Eiler, 'Das nassauische Landesdenkmal in Wiesbaden-Biebrich: ein Symbol nassauischen Selbstbehauptungswillens um die Jahrhundertwende', *Nassauische Annalen*, 95 (1984), pp. 193–208.

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Cf. Thomas Adam, *Philanthropy, Civil Society, and the State in German History, 1815–1989* (Rochester, N.Y., 2016); Jürgen Kocka and Manuel Frey (eds), *Bürgerkultur and Mäzenatentum im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1998); and Thomas W. Gaetgens and Martin Schieder (eds), *Mäzenatisches Handeln: Studien zur Kultur des Bürgersinns in der Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1998).

105

For an examination of the Fatherland Museum's importance in the context of the contemporary *Heimat* movement, see Martin Roth, *Heimatmuseum: zur Geschichte einer deutschen Institution* (Berlin, 1990), pp. 38–42; Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, National Memory, and Imperial Germany, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill, 1997), pp. 140–1, 152.

106

Sybille Obenaus, 'Das "Vaterländische Museum" in Celle und seine "Ehrenhalle der hannoverschen Armee": ein Museumsverein zwischen Welfenstolz und Kaisersgunst', *Celler Chronik*, 10 (2002), p. 53.

107

See guestbook in Stadtarchiv Celle, Best.29/3.

108

Angelica Hack, 'Wilhelm Bomann—Leben und Wirken', in Museumsverein Celle e. V. (ed.), *100 Jahre Bomann-Museum Celle 1892–1992* (Celle, 1992), p. 35.

109

'Guelph Incident', *Economist*, 1 Nov. 1913, p. 958.

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On this point, cf. Frank-Lothar Kroll, 'Zwischen europäischem Bewußtsein und nationaler Identität', in Hans-Christof Kraus and Thomas Niklas (eds), *Geschichte der Politik: alte und neue Wege* (Munich, 2007), pp. 364–6.

111

Laurence Cole, 'Military Veterans and Popular Patriotism in Imperial Austria, 1870–1914', in Laurence Cole and Daniel Unowsky (eds), *The Limits of Loyalty: Imperial Symbolism, Popular Allegiances, and State Patriotism in the Late Habsburg Monarchy* (Oxford, 2007), p. 55

112

Giloi, *Monarchy, Myth and Material Culture*, pp. 332–3. Hohenzollern self-aggrandizement through the selective borrowing of other families' cultural capital was by no means limited to the dynasties deposed in 1866. Cases in point are Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm's restoration of the Castle Church in Wittenberg to portray the Hohenzollerns as the 'political, genealogical, and spiritual successors' of the Wettins, Germany's foremost Protestant dynasty during the Reformation, and Wilhelm II's donation of a statue of William of Orange to the city of Wiesbaden to celebrate his descent from the Dutch national hero. Müller, *Our Fritz*, p. 143; Rolf Faber, 'Die Denkmäler für Herzog Adolph von Nassau in Biebrich (1909), Weilburg (1907) und Königstein/Ts. (1910): zur Einweihung des Nassauischen Landesdenkmals in Wiesbaden-Biebrich vor 100 Jahren', *Nassauische Annalen*, 120 (2009), p. 502.

113

Christopher Clark, 'Fathers and Sons in the History of the Hohenzollern Dynasty', in Frank Lorenz Müller and Heidi Mehrkens (eds), *Sons and Heirs: Succession and Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Basingstoke, 2016), p. 19.