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# The Military Revolution and Political Change

ORIGINS OF DEMOCRACY AND  
AUTOCRACY IN EARLY  
MODERN EUROPE

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## CHAPTER FOUR

## Brandenburg-Prussia

THE LANDS of Brandenburg, Pomerania, and East Prussia, which Prussia comprised in 1660, faced numerous wars in the seventeenth century. Decentralized, constitutional regimes became a single, absolutist state. The absence of effective allies, foreign subsidies, commercial wealth, or natural defenses mandated systematic and harsh extraction of domestic resources. Mobilization of resources for wars destroyed constitutionalism and set into motion the development of military-bureaucratic absolutism. The estates, local autonomy, the rule of law, and many individual rights were abolished. Dynamics were put into play that led to the fusion of key classes to the state, the state's adoption of a managerial position in regard to civil society, and the manipulation of politics by the bureaucracy. In short, the broad contours of Prussian and German history were formed by the military situation of the seventeenth century.

## CONSTITUTIONALISM IN EAST ELBIA

It is convenient but inaccurate to conflate German history into a monothematic, militarist drive, from the sanguinary *Drang nach Osten* to gambits for mastery of Europe during the twentieth century. The course of Prussian and German history meanders widely, from the medieval period to the outset of the early modern period, from the rigid authority of the Teutonic Knights to the Republic of Nobles of the sixteenth century, which in critical ways resembles the Whig hegemony of England, and hardly seems a foundation for military absolutism.

As we have seen, the Holy Roman Empire diminished in political importance as its principalities, duchies, and bishoprics built autonomy at the expense of the emperor. Attempts to build a permanent imperial army, financial system, and judiciary were blocked by the strength of nominal vassals. The balance between emperor and prince shifted dramatically in the latter's favor. A new balance emerged in the lands of the Empire, between the prince on the one hand and the nobles and burghers on the other.<sup>1</sup> This was no less true in the "authoritarian" east, that

<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Buchda, "Reichsstände und Landstände in Deutschland im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert," *Gouvernés et Gouvernants* 4 (1984): 193–226; Hajo Holborn, *History of Germany*, Volume 1: *The Reformation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 3–55.

is, Brandenburg, Pomerania, and the duchy of East Prussia, than it was in the "democratic" west. Until the middle of the seventeenth century, the East Elbian lands had substantial constitutional arrangements, ranging from villages of peasant colonists to the halls of the estates.

The Hohenzollern state prior to the accession of the Great Elector (r. 1640–1688) was hardly an imposing structure. It had only recently begun to emerge from that collection of personal retinue and demesne managers that made up the medieval state. Until the second half of the sixteenth century, when legal specialists began to enter state service, there was little in the way of functional specialization or professional training.<sup>2</sup> Hohenzollern bailiffs in the localities were nominally royal appointees, but in practice they were loyal to local nobles, who helped to select them. The elector's attempts to build a privy council with which he might increase chancery power at the expense of the estates ended in failure.<sup>3</sup>

The Hohenzollern chancery operated within a constitutional framework, the most important part of which was the estates. The estates of Brandenburg and Pomerania were first convoked in the late thirteenth century when demesne revenue no longer sufficed to pay for even small state expenditures. Though stripped of one important *Stand* during the Reformation, by the early seventeenth century the estates had developed into able representative bodies that shaped foreign policy, supervised and audited the crown's undertakings, influenced the appointment of ministers and local administrators, and handled the collection of taxes and tolls they had approved.<sup>4</sup> So strong were the estates of Brandenburg and Pomerania that Carsten has noted that "the power of the Estates was thus firmly secured, more firmly than in any other German principality."<sup>5</sup> Another source goes further: "The Estates of Brandenburg . . . kept the development of [that] polity on the Elbe and the Oder abreast of that on

<sup>2</sup> Sidney B. Fay and Klaus Epstein, *The Rise of Brandenburg-Prussia to 1786* (New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1964), pp. 20–26, 40–43; Heinrich Otto Meisner, "Die monarchische Regierungsform in Brandenburg-Preußen," in Richard Dietrich, ed., *Forschungen zu Staat und Verfassung: Festgabe für Fritz Hartung* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1958), pp. 219–45; Sidney Bradshaw Fay, "The Hohenzollern Household and Administration in the Sixteenth Century," *Smith College Studies in History* 2 (1916): 1–64.

<sup>3</sup> Meisner, "Die monarchische Regierungsform," pp. 219–30; Reinhold August Dorwart, *The Administrative Reforms of Frederick William I of Prussia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), pp. 5–22; Herbert Tuttle, *History of Prussia to the Accession of Frederick the Great, 1134–1740* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1884), pp. 225–28.

<sup>4</sup> F. L. Carsten, *The Origins of Prussia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 165–78; Meisner, "Die monarchische Regierungsform," pp. 219–25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168. See also Peter Baumgart, "Zur Geschichte der kurmärkischen Stände im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert," in Otto Büsch and Wolfgang Neugebauer, eds., *Moderne Preußische Geschichte, 1648–1947: Eine Anthologie*, Volume 2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), pp. 509–31.



the Thames, down to an epoch more recent than is commonly supposed."<sup>6</sup>

In East Prussia the power of the estates was as well established by the seventeenth century as that of the estates in Brandenburg and Pomerania, but its origins were more recent. Owing to their cohesiveness as brothers in a military elite, the Teutonic Knights were successful in maintaining political power exclusively in their hands and in refusing an estate. It was not until the disastrous wars with Poland in the early fifteenth century that the Order found itself facing fiscal and political crises. Funds dried up and levies refused to fight. The Order had no alternative but to convoke an estates whose rights and liberties were later guaranteed by the Polish crown.<sup>7</sup> By the next century, the Order had been secularized and disbanded; constitutional arrangements crystallized into what Carsten called an *Adelsrepublik*.<sup>8</sup>

Local government, too, was very much in evidence. In the trading centers along the Baltic coast, alderman supplanted the duke's *advocati*, built their own judiciaries, and instituted charters recognized by regional authorities. The strength of the towns was sufficient in many areas to coerce nobles into razing adjacent castles.<sup>9</sup> Towns frequently allied with

<sup>6</sup> Tuttle, *History of Prussia*, p. 103.

<sup>7</sup> Kings in adjacent territories frequently protected the estates of potential rivals for reasons not long to seek: a strong estates generally meant a militarily weaker state. The Wittelsbachs protected the Estates of Württemberg from ducal authority, and Louis XIV became the champion of the *Landtage* of western Germany. See F. L. Carsten, *Princes and Parliaments in Germany: From the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).

<sup>8</sup> Franz Carsten, "Die Entstehung des Junkertums," in Otto Büsch and Peter Neugebauer, eds., *Moderne preußische Geschichte, 1648–1947: Eine Anthologie*, Volume 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), p. 278. On the power of the Teutonic Knights and development of the East Prussian estates, see Karol Górski, "La Ligue des Etats et les origines du régime représentatif en Prusse," *Studies Presented to the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions* 23 (1960): 177–85; Karol Górski, "Die Anfänge der Repräsentation der *Communitas Nobilium* in Polen, im Ordensstaat Preußen und in Ungarn im Mittelalter," *Studies Presented to the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions* 36 (1966): 19–24; W. F. Reddaway et al., eds., *The Cambridge History of Poland: From the Origins to Sobieski to 1696* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), pp. 141–46; Michael Burleigh, *Prussian Society and the German Order: An Aristocratic Order in Crisis, c. 1410–1466* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 134–70. The political conflicts between the Order and the populace were exacerbated by the Order's recruitment mainly from Austria, Switzerland, and the Netherlands—a policy that served further to alienate the Order from its subjects.

<sup>9</sup> Carsten, *Origins of Prussia*, pp. 47–48, 81–88; Herbert Helbig, *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft der Mark Brandenburg im Mittelalter* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1973), pp. 18–68. Towns and villages tended to augment their independence during interregna and periods of anarchy brought on by war and plague.

one another, either into the Hanse or into regional pacts separate from the great trading league.<sup>10</sup> Shortly after the conquest of the indigenous Slavic populace, settlers were attracted, mostly from the free peasantry of Franconia, Saxony, and Flanders. Local government came with the village settlement. A nonnoble locator contracted with prospective colonists and normally became the village *Schulz*, a position combining mayor and justice of the peace. The founding of a village was occasioned by the enactment of a *Handfeste*, a constitutional document delineating the legal status, rights, and service requirements of peasants as well as nobles. Bylaws (*Willküren*, *Beliebungen*, *Dreidingordnungen*) elaborated basic principles. The village court (*Landding*) consisted of the Schulz and juries (*Landschöffen*) comprised of villagers owning two to six *Hufen*, a property requirement that many peasants could meet. Even nobles were subject to the justice of the Landding.<sup>11</sup>

Though nominally under the authority of the lord, the peasant owed him only light labor services and ground rents. The peasant could quit the lord's service upon paying a mere quarter mark; his holdings were heritable, and the lord exerted little or no administrative control over him. A contemporary phrase claimed, with some exaggeration no doubt, that the noble was the "peasant's neighbor." Both were under the administrative control of the village Schulz and bound by the settlement's *Handfeste*.<sup>12</sup> In East Prussia, the numerous free peasantry (*Kölmer*) participated in councils that debated local issues and drew up agendas for upcoming meetings of the estates. Though not eligible for actual representation as a separate estate, the Kölmer nonetheless articulated interest; deputies returning from meetings of the estates were accountable to

<sup>10</sup> Philippe Dollinger, *The German Hansa*, D. S. Ault and S. H. Steinberg, trans. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1970), pp. 92–97; Tuttle, *History of Prussia*, pp. 55–56.

<sup>11</sup> Carsten, *Origins of Prussia*, pp. 29–40, 81–88; Heide Wunder, "Peasant Organization and Class Conflict in Eastern and Western Germany," in T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin, eds., *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 92–94; Helbig, *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft*, pp. 10–12. More traditional Slavic village governments, predating the Order's conquest, survived in East Prussia. See Wunder, "Peasant Organization and Class Conflict," pp. 93–94. Brenner and Wunder conflict sharply over the independence of the Schulzen, the former seeing them as agents of the nobility or the Order, the latter as true spokesmen for the peasant village. Burleigh's impressive archival research (*Prussian Society and the German Order*, pp. 13–25) tends to support Wunder. The village Schulz seems to have been somewhere between Quisling and William Tell; nonetheless his local constitutional import as mayor, justice of the peace, and peasant representative to outside authority is unmistakable, hence placing him closer to Schiller's hero.

<sup>12</sup> Carsten, *Origins of Prussia*, pp. 29–68, and "Die Entstehung des Junkertums," pp. 267–69; Burleigh, *Prussian Society and the German Order*, pp. 25–34.



them.<sup>13</sup> The peasants of medieval East Elbia, with their legal status and codified guarantees, were among the freest and most privileged in all Europe.

Law has already been alluded to in reference to the charters, Handfesten, and village bylaws. The potential for arbitrary use of law was further restrained by the absence of a unified system of law until the mid-sixteenth century. Prior to that, law had been based on local customs brought by colonists, though the venerable Saxon customary law (Sachsenspiegel) seems to have served as a basis for most law.<sup>14</sup> The Elector Joachim II (r. 1535–1571) introduced a standardized legal system based on Roman Law, but implementation and interpretation lay in the hands of local judiciaries independent of the Elector. Though procedural and interpretive guidelines had been laid down, constitutional government was strong; finance, foreign policy, and important domestic matters were still under the purview of the estates.

It should be evident that at the outset of the early modern period the lands that became Prussia were not a basis for a Sparta of the North. A careful reading of the medieval history of East Elbia admits no evidence of a militaristic, absolutist outcome. In fact, the region resembles much of western Europe, including England: "The rights of the people were as clearly understood, and perhaps as securely guarded, as anywhere in Europe; and it follows that only ignorance or servility can attempt to divine the absolute Prussian kings of later times legitimately and organically from their ancestors."<sup>15</sup> The origins of the Prussian military state are to be found in a more recent epoch.

#### THE END OF CONSTITUTIONALISM AND THE RISE OF ABSOLUTISM, 1640–1740

The eastern marks of the Holy Roman Empire were founded through conquest of indigenous Slavic tribes. Though threats continued from the frontiers to the east, border defenses were not heavy; warfare was intermittent at most, and conducted by traditional feudal levies. The rise of Muscovy, the collapse of the Livonian Knight territories in Courland, and the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) shattered the relative tranquility of the Baltic littoral. Brandenburg was occupied by foreign troops and systematically exploited; the government fled to the safety of Königsberg. Wallenstein's army extracted tons of gold from the treasury, only to retreat before an onslaught of Swedish mulcters. The

<sup>13</sup> Carsten, *Origins of Prussia*, pp. 10–42, 204.

<sup>14</sup> Eberhardt Schmidt, *Rechtsentwicklung in Preussen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961), pp. 1–5; Tuttle, *History of Prussia*, pp. 47–51, 78–93.

<sup>15</sup> Tuttle, *History of Prussia*, p. 42.

Elector found himself forced to cooperate with whichever army was currently the occupying power.<sup>16</sup> Even after the Peace of Westphalia (1648), tensions between Sweden and Poland placed Brandenburg in a dangerous geopolitical position between two hostile states (a position Poland would know after Prussia had modernized).

The military of Brandenburg was based on town militias and an antediluvian levy. Town militias were ill-equipped, if at all; training was ludicrously poor. The levy could call up a thousand or so cavalry—a small, backward force that would have been cut to pieces by the modern cavalry of Gustavus Adolphus or Pappenheim.<sup>17</sup> Yet even this levy was unreliable: vassals had sworn allegiance to both the Elector and the Holy Roman Emperor and used this excuse to shirk all military duty.<sup>18</sup> If the region was to remain sovereign and not become a province or tributary state, its sparse resources would have to be mobilized and a modern military built, against protestations from the estates. There was no choice but to mobilize domestic resources. Brandenburg could not wage war abroad availing itself of the resources of Saxony or some other adjoining land: that would have swiftly entailed facing the armies of Austria or the Empire, with only the small forces then at its disposal. Geography had not been kind to the small principality on the east European plains. Its only natural defenses, the Oder and the Elbe, need not have been crossed by an invader from the south, and the Swedes had already established a glaxis on the south coast of the Baltic.

It might well be asked why, amidst the chaotic warfare of the period, Brandenburg was not able to build alliances that would have reduced the military danger and provided subsidies, thus reducing the need to extract domestic resources. From the perspective of the great powers (Sweden, Spain, France, Austria), what would be the worth of such an alliance? Brandenburg had no army or navy to aid one's cause; it had no great wealth, as did Venice and the Dutch Republic, to subsidize an ally's army. An alliance with a small, poor territory would only have further strained one's military resources at a time when countries were locked in a life-and-death struggle.<sup>19</sup> Brandenburg had no great domestic wealth

<sup>16</sup> Ferdinand Schevill, *The Great Elector* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), pp. 39–52; Hans Delbrück, *History of the Art of War within the Framework of Political History*, Volume 4: *The Modern Era* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), p. 243.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 242–44.

<sup>18</sup> Gustav Schmoller, "Die Entstehung des preußischen Heeres von 1640 bis 1740," in Büsch and Neugebauer, *Moderne preußische Geschichte*, Volume 2, pp. 749–53.

<sup>19</sup> Timing of subsidies is crucial. Had subsidies flowed in prior to the dissolution of the estates, constitutionalism might have survived. Once Brandenburg-Prussia had established itself as a military power in wars against the Turks, Swedes, and French, subsidies and alliances were forthcoming. In the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), Frederick the Great received over 270 million talers in subsidies from England. But, inasmuch as these subsidies



from which to obtain revenues and resources for its military. The export of grain to the west was lucrative, but did not make the wealth of the Junkers rival that of the English gentry. The region's soil was rather poor, and much of the profit from the grain trade was reaped by Dutch and English merchants, who had dominated the Baltic routes for over a century. In fact, export agriculture had led to the deterioration of many commercial centers of East Elbia. Exports went through only a few ports, at the expense of the guild-dominated ones, whose labor costs made them unattractive.<sup>20</sup>

The wraith of Brandenburg-Prussian constitutionalism appeared during the Thirty Years' War, portending its death several decades hence. The great war and ensuing chaos offered the Elector of Brandenburg and Pomerania the opportunity to enact extraordinary policies and arrogate authority from the estates. The Elector's council, later dubbed the *Kriegsrat*, levied taxes and raised a small army without estate approval. Objections by estate members led to their arrest and trial for treason. In the face of foreign invasion, reason of state replaced centuries-old proceduralism. But the close of the war breathed new life into constitutionalism. The war council was disbanded, and the estates regained most of their power. A short peace having broken out, absolutism was postponed. The Northern War (1655–1660), in which Brandenburg fought Poland and then Sweden, proved to be the decisive turning point in Prussian political history. With war imminent, the Great Elector obtained from the estates of Brandenburg and Pomerania sufficient funding for a small standing army, in exchange for the confirmation of privileges, and exemptions, the sanctioning of enserfment (*Leibeigenschaft*). What had seemed to the estates to be an equitable quid pro quo shifted the domestic balance of power to the Elector, who now had the ultimate arbiter of future constitutional conflicts, a standing army.

The army would cast the deciding vote in 1657 when the estates refused further funding. In the midst of the Northern War and reeling from an atavistic and devastating Tatar raid, the Great Elector proclaimed his right to levy taxes without the approval of the estates, and used the army to collect them. Protest became markedly more timid and even these

came only after the destruction of constitutionalism, their significance for constitutional history is negligible. Foreign subsidies in the years after the destruction of the estates went into Frederick's war chest and only strengthened absolutism in Prussia. On subsidies, see Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 4, pp. 246–47; and Hubert C. Johnson, *Frederick the Great and His Officials* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 134–87.

<sup>20</sup> See Carsten, *Origins of Prussia*, pp. 117–35; Carsten, "Entstehung des Junkertums," pp. 269–77.

were answered with terse references to the need for expedients.<sup>21</sup> The power of the estates became negligible; their deliberations when they gathered together were quiet and meaningless. When the close of the Northern War placed the Duchy of Prussia under Brandenburg sovereignty, parliamentary conflict began anew, this time in Königsberg rather than Berlin, and without the farcical qualities of many historical repetitions. A decade of dispute ended with the outbreak of war with France in 1672. The need for additional infusions into the Elector's army led to the deployment of troops against the Königsberg opposition. Neither the great issues of the day, nor even the small ones, would any longer be decided by parliamentary speeches and majority decisions. The union of Brandenburg-Prussia was forged in an epoch of iron and blood centuries before Bismarck.<sup>22</sup>

The Great Elector's defeat of the estates is a familiar story, recounting only part of military exigency's destruction of constitutionalism. The decline of the estates was accompanied by the rise of the cornerstone of Prussian military-bureaucratic absolutism, the *Generalkriegskommissariat*. In the middle of the seventeenth century, it controlled the administration, supply, and recruitment of the army, and, at least until the peace with Poland, it collected taxes and controlled its own budget. But with war against France in 1672, it regained these functions, and began to penetrate local government and virtually every part of civil society.

The Generalkriegskommissariat established a three-tier administrative apparatus with its central command in Berlin, the *Oberkriegskommissarien* in the provinces, and a network of officials (*Kriegskommissarien* and *Steuerkommissarien*) at the local levels.<sup>23</sup> Its original duties of collecting taxes soon expanded into administrative and judicial areas. The *commissarii loci* (as the commissions were called in the towns) assumed control of the judiciary, attained control over the mayoralties and police, and otherwise managed town affairs.<sup>24</sup> The instruments of local government

<sup>21</sup> See Fritz Hartung, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte vom 15. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Eighth Edition (Stuttgart: K. F. Koehler, 1950), pp. 92–112; Schmoller, "Entstehung des preußischen Heeres," pp. 751–58; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 4, pp. 242–45.

<sup>22</sup> The pivotal nature of war in the defeat of the estates is noted by Carsten: "The war [against France in 1672] decisively affected the relations between Frederick William and the Prussian Estates . . . exactly as the Estates of Brandenburg . . . were deprived of their power by the war of 1655–1660." *Origins of Prussia*, pp. 218–19.

<sup>23</sup> Hintze, "Der Commissarius und seine Bedeutung in der allgemeinen Verwaltungsgeschichte," in *Staat und Verfassung: Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur allgemeinen Verfassungsgeschichte*, Fritz Hartung, ed. (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1941), pp. 233–35.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233; Carsten, *Origins of Prussia*, p. 197; Hartung, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte*, p. 68.



in the countryside fared a little better. Whereas the estates had formerly managed local affairs through the *Kreisdirektoren*, the directors were absorbed by state commissars into the *Landräte*. The Landrat was intended to be Berlin's overseer in the provinces, managing the police, maintaining bridges and roadways, and surveiling local nobles, but in practice it afforded the nobles a measure of politicking. The Landrat provided a forum for the articulation and protection of local interests, especially during times of state weakness. It is necessary to bear this in mind to prevent conceptualizing the rise of the Prussian state as a seventeenth-century *Gleichschaltung* (a point to which we shall return in discussing parlements and assemblies in France). Despite the preponderance of state power, a measure of politics went on, especially at the local level. The state relied heavily on the nobility and allowed a measure of local control as long as control over taxation and the army remained in its hands. Absolutism was never absolute.<sup>25</sup>

The extension and intrusion of the Generalkriegskommissariat must be distinguished from the growth and differentiation of social-based political development. The growth of the state came not from public demand for services or from anyone's class interest; it was a consequence of war and the need to prepare for it. The rise of the Generalkriegskommissariat stemmed from the imperative of mobilizing, by the most expeditious means, Prussia's sparse resources. This was essential in the face of a dangerous military situation in which the country's sovereignty was threatened from the north by Sweden, from the east by Poland and Russia, from the south by Austria and the Tatars, and in the distant west by France, which eyed the Hohenzollern western enclaves of Cleves and Jülich. Precedent and procedure suffered, but that was the price of continued independence.

The rise of a military-centered state made itself felt on aspects of constitutionalism other than the estates. The first steps in the transformation of law were taken with the destruction of the estates and the intimidation of its leadership. The prince was no longer first among equals; he could now act above the law, wielding the state, including the law, for reasons of state.<sup>26</sup> Elements of new princely authority manifested themselves in

<sup>25</sup> Robert M. Berdahl, "The *Stände* and the Origins of Conservatism in Prussia," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 6 (1973): 298–321, and *The Politics of the Prussian Nobility: The Development of a Conservative Ideology 1770–1848* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988). Hartung, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte*, pp. 107–116. Though providing a measure of representation, the Junker Landräte were no carriers of constitutionalism. They strongly opposed the liberal Stein-Hardenberg Reforms and had to be replaced by civil servants. They were obstacles to democracy stemming from a labor-repressive agrarian system, as Moore's argument suggests.

<sup>26</sup> The Hohenzollerns made themselves officially and "legally" above the law but elected to keep their bureaucracies subject to it as a means of controlling the bureaucrats. See Hans

the legal system. The crown could order the death penalty for virtually any offense; cases could be arrogated from provincial courts to those of the crown. In many cases punishments were out of proportion to the offense (e.g., those for burglary, importing wool, and desertion during peacetime). A consequentialist logic entered the judicial process: punishments served not only to punish offenders, but also to demonstrate overwhelming power, to intimidate and regiment the country. There was no autonomy of the judiciary from the rest of the state; judge and advocate were trained in state universities. All served. The old rights of appeal to the courts of the Holy Roman Emperor and (in East Prussia) to the Polish crown were curtailed. This transition in itself is hardly evidence of an authoritarian trend; it was a common part of state building and establishing sovereignty. But now the highest court of appeal was the crown's privy council, in which law was an instrument of implementing the policies of the state. In Hintze's words: "Justice was the stepchild of the military and police state."<sup>27</sup>

Arrogating cases and draconian punishments conflict with Roman Law's concern with proceduralism, just punishments, and cautious weighing of evidence, and hence do not derive from that quarter. The transformation of law stemmed from the new power the crown derived from its army and bureaucratic apparatus. The crown heeded the jurisprudence of Pufendorf, who argued that, when a country is in danger, as Prussia would be until at least 1815, rights and liberties of the estates and subjects cease.<sup>28</sup> In a dangerous military situation, the crown could not be paralyzed by pettifogging mandates of procedural correctness and respect for tradition. It is important not to exaggerate the authoritarian nature of the Prussian judicial system. The Hohenzollern state was able to construct a highly efficient legal system staffed by trained professionals in which a fair trial could be obtained. Most criminal and civil cases were ably handled by a professional legal corps. But with the monarch effectively above the law, directing the judiciary, potential for manipulation and arbitrariness inhered in the system. Interference and arrogation were hardly the rule, but we cannot dismiss them as isolated exceptions without relation to a changed constitution. Institutional checks on pre-

Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience, 1660–1815* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), pp. 45–56.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Dorwart, *Administrative Reforms*, p. 73. Cf. Montesquieu: "Mr Law, through ignorance of both a republican and monarchical constitution, was one of the greatest promoters of absolute power in Europe." *The Spirit of the Laws* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Robert Clarke, 1873), p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> See Hartung, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte*, p. 105; Schmoller, "Entstehung des preußischen Heeres," p. 751; and Franz L. Neumann, *The Rule of Law: Political Theory and the Legal System in Modern Society* (Leamington Spa, U.K.: Berg, 1986), pp. 92–99.



rogative were gone, but only the most myopic ruler risks legitimacy and stability by repeated, egregious violations of substantive and procedural norms. To do so might trigger a rebellion of the peasantry or aristocracy. The Hohenzollerns were not despots. Short of this, however, the new political equation between state and society afforded the Hohenzollerns the opportunity to exercise far greater discretion in legal matters than their predecessors had enjoyed.

The revolution in government made itself felt in the daily life of the peasantry. The decline of the estates of course meant little to them, but militarization of the country made itself felt everywhere, and, when it was combined with the erosion of individual rights and liberties entailed in the manorial reaction of previous centuries, the peasant of East Elbia became little more than chattel.<sup>29</sup> Peasants were impressed into the army or into labor crews charged with the construction of fortifications and the maintenance of roads. Delbrück deftly segues from normative to practical concerns: "[T]hese actions undermined all legal concepts and caused the most serious damage to the country. . . . The peasants were no longer willing to bring their produce into town because they feared they would be seized there and turned over to the recruiters. Younger men crossed over the border in droves in order to escape service."<sup>30</sup> This hurt the economy as well as the army, and led to the introduction of the *Kanton-system* in 1733. The peasant was tied to his Kanton, trained in military skills, then sent home to maintain agricultural output at optimal levels. He had to quarter troops of the standing army; marriage and travel had to be approved by his regimental commander. When this system was combined with the results of the manorial reaction (legal ties to the soil, the destruction of peasant government, and sharply increased service requirements), the rights of the peasantry were all but destroyed. The peasants were trapped "between the manor and the regiment" (*zwischen Gut und Regiment*). Even the children of the Junkers were forcibly enrolled in cadet schools—something, one suspects, to which they soon became more receptive.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> A fuller treatment of the impact of the manorial reaction on constitutional government will be undertaken in the final chapter.

<sup>30</sup> Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 4, p. 247.

<sup>31</sup> Schmoller, "Entstehung des preußischen Heeres," pp. 758–66; Martin A. Kitchen, *Military History of Germany from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), pp. 6–26; Otto Büsch, *Militärsystem und Sozialleben im alten Preussen, 1713–1807: Die Anfänge der sozialen Militarisierung der preußisch-deutschen Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1962), pp. 1–163; Gerhard Oestreich, *Friedrich Wilhelm I.: Preußischer Absolutismus, Merkantilismus, Militarismus* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1977), pp. 71–81; Walter L. Dorn, *Competition for Empire, 1740–1763* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 90–99; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 4, pp. 257–58;

The Kantonsystem militarized the whole of Prussia, and a residue of it is our inability to think of it without associations with the army and warfare: "The whole country was a training school for soldiers. The rattle of muskets, the tramp of armed men was heard summer and winter from the Memel to the Rhine. . . ."<sup>32</sup> In 1760 one out of every fourteen Prussians was serving in the military, whereas in another military-bureaucratic absolutism, France, the figure was only one in eighty-six.<sup>33</sup> The impact of the military system on society is bluntly expressed in the opening words of a classic study:

Das soziale System des preußischen Staates in der Epoche seiner Geschichte von den Reformen des . . . Friedrich William I., seit 1713 bis zur Zeit der Erneuerung durch . . . Stein und . . . Hardenberg nach 1807 ist im übereinstimmenden Urteil von zeitgenössischer Kritik und späterer Geschichtsschreibung in hohem Maße ein Ergebnis der altpreussischen Heeresverfassung des 18. Jahrhunderts gewesen. Die preußische Armee war Anlaß, Mittel und Basis zugleich für die Errichtung, Ausbildung und Aufrechterhaltung dieses sozialen Systems.<sup>34</sup>

By the early eighteenth century, virtually every aspect of constitutional government had been destroyed, replaced by a bureaucratic state charged with extracting men and material for the growing army.<sup>35</sup>

#### THE ARTICULATION OF MILITARY-BUREAUCRATIC ABSOLUTISM

The need to mobilize national resources had long-run consequences that patterned much of Prussian and German history. As absolutism became more fully developed, it shaped social, economic, and political developments, including a fusion of nobility and state, high rates of taxation and

<sup>32</sup> Tuttle, *History of Prussia*, p. 381. Cf. the Japanese army's militarization of society in Richard J. Smethurst, *A Social Basis for Prewar Japanese Militarism: The Army and the Rural Community* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974).

<sup>33</sup> See André Corvisier, *Armies and Societies in Europe 1494–1789*, Abigail T. Siddall, trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 113.

<sup>34</sup> "The social system of the Prussian state in the period of its history from the innovations of Friedrich Wilhelm I of 1713 to the time of the Stein-Hardenberg Reforms after 1807 was, in the unanimous view of contemporary critic and later historiography alike, largely the result of the old Prussian military system of the eighteenth century. The Prussian army was at the same time occasion, means, and basis for the establishment, development, and maintenance of this social system." Büsch, *Militärsystem und Sozialleben*, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Owing to their poverty and lack of institutionalized power following the Reformation, the Prussian clergy became subordinated to the state. See Mary Fulbrook, *Piety and Politics: Religion and the Rise of Absolutism in England, Württemberg and Prussia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 84–88, 153–73.



low rates of economic growth, the state's managerial relationship to civil society, and a supportive cultural-ideological configuration.

The first consequence of military-bureaucratic absolutism is the fusion of the nobility and the state. Barrington Moore views this as the result of commercialization of agriculture relying on overt labor repression (tying formerly free peasants to the soil), as opposed to relying on wage incentives to ensure the labor force (as in England and the American Midwest). But for Moore the fusion takes place at a much later stage in the modernization process—in the Prussian/German case, near the close of the nineteenth century, when the Junkers sought help to shore up their declining economic position.<sup>36</sup> Initial fusion took place much earlier, beginning with the very inception of absolutism. From its inception to its collapse, with only a brief interlude of reform during the Napoleonic Wars, the Prussian state reserved high offices for the noble caste. Prussian electors and kings generally preferred the character of men of high birth to the suspect qualities of commoners. Although the Great Elector's father and Friedrich Wilhelm I (r. 1710–1740) had a definite preference for beholden non-Junkers in the civil service, a preference shared by neither the Great Elector nor Frederick the Great, the officer corps was overwhelmingly Junker, and remained so until the National Socialist period.<sup>37</sup> It was this early fusion with the military-bureaucratic state, and not the petty tyranny of the Prussian latifundia, that accounts for the survival into modern times of the ideology of a natural elite and a warrior-caste ethos.<sup>38</sup>

There are three reasons for the fusion of the nobility to the state. First, the rise of the state had destroyed the estates and the nobility's provincial Kreisdirektoren but did not threaten the Junkers' economic position as heads of their manors. In fact, the growth of the Prussian monarchical state was occasioned by two quid pro quo with the Junkers, which solidified their economic basis. The Recess of 1653 gave the Great Elector tax revenue and an army in exchange for recognition of serfdom, administrative control of their peasants, and the right to import and export most commodities free of the excise. When the expenses of the War of the Spanish Succession necessitated the abolition of Junker tax immunities, Friedrich

<sup>36</sup> Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), pp. 435–37.

<sup>37</sup> See Karl Demeter, "Die Herkunft des preußischen Offizierkorps," in Büsch and Neugebauer, *Moderne preußische Geschichte*, Volume 2, pp. 879–907; Walter L. Dorn, "The Prussian Bureaucracy in the Eighteenth Century, III," *Political Science Quarterly* 47 (1932): 262–69; Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy*, p. 70; and Carsten, *Origins of Prussia*, pp. 258–59.

<sup>38</sup> Military service and estate ownership were closely related; together, they preserved such ideological configurations. See Büsch, *Militärssystem und Sozialleben*.

Wilhelm I mollified them and solidified their loyalty by embellishing their privileges: Junker estates were formally allodialized (the threat of archaic feudal claims of domain was removed); only nobles could purchase the land of fellow noblemen, thereby making the walls of a Stand less permeable; and local land-credit offices were set up under Junker control to help impecunious brethren.<sup>39</sup> Hence, a mutually beneficial modus vivendi developed quite early between state and nobleman: the latter obtained legal guarantees and privileges, the former a loyal officer corps and civil service.

Politically and socially powerful though they were, few Junkers attained the wealth of the English gentry. Most estates were relatively small tracts upon which only a barely comfortable life could be eked out. For many Junkers, state service was not just a source of more power and status, it was an economic necessity.<sup>40</sup> The final impetus toward fusion was the absence of the ecclesiastical offices in which nobles had traditionally ensconced their sons prior to the Reformation. Without this traditional outlet for younger sons, only careers in the state and the army could provide them with the positions of status and honor their birth required: "Die Entstehung des stehenden Heeres löste für viele Adelsfamilien die Frage, wie sie ihre jüngeren Söhne versorgen konnten: eine Frage, die seit der Einführung der Reformation besonders dringend war."<sup>41</sup>

High rates of taxation are mandated (at least in the absence of extraordinary means of revenue, such as massive foreign sources) by the need to recruit and outfit the army, to supply troops with efficient weaponry, to research and develop the next generation of armaments, and to fund the central organizations managing these operations. Prussia was not a wealthy land and, what is more, its population base was low. Building a first-rate army required an immense tax burden on the region, the extent of which is conveyed by comparison to France. In 1688 the Prussian state

<sup>39</sup> See Rudolf Braun, "Taxation, Sociopolitical Structure, and State-Building: Great Britain and Brandenburg-Prussia," in Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of the National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 274–77; and Berdahl, *Politics of the Prussian Nobility*, pp. 77–80. Note that this was not a case of the nobility's use of the state to shore up its economic position—that came only much later. It was, rather, a mutually beneficial arrangement between state and important social group.

<sup>40</sup> Dorn shows that, in 1767, of 1,700 nobles in Brandenburg and Pomerania, only 400 could afford to live without supplementing their estate income with state service. See "Prussian Bureaucracy, III," p. 263. On the comparable poverty and fusion of much of the Russian nobility, see Robert E. Jones, *The Emancipation of the Russian Nobility, 1762–1785* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973).

<sup>41</sup> "The rise of the standing army solved for many noble families the question of how they could provide for their younger sons, a question that from the introduction of the Reformation was especially urgent." Carsten, "Entstehung des Junkertums," p. 280.



extracted from its population of about one million just under 3.4 million talers, while Louis XIV extracted from some twenty million subjects in his economically advanced domain the equivalent of 36.6 million talers—on a per-capita basis approximately half as much as their counterparts east of the Rhine.<sup>42</sup>

All this was a burden on economic development: capital formation and private investment were low, peasants fled or at least attempted to do so, and certain absolute economic declines took place as peasants slaughtered livestock to reduce taxable property. Taxation was hardly the lone factor accounting for backwardness. Most of Prussia (save East Prussia) had very poor soil. The promising growth of Hanse towns had been stifled by the loss of much of the Baltic trade to the Dutch in the fifteenth century. The Prussian economy, which had seemed so promising a century prior to the Thirty Years' War, was retarded in no small part by high and, in some cases, literally confiscatory taxation. Peasants relinquished exorbitant percentages of their income to tax collectors.<sup>43</sup> Two political consequences follow from the economic situation. First, the development of an independent bourgeoisie was less likely. Prussia was hardly an auspicious place to invest capital, not only because of high taxes, but also because of the state's extension to the nobility of the privileges of importing and reselling without paying the excise. There would be no economically vital burgher class pressuring for charters of rights and a share in government. Second, domestic conflict took place in a tight, constrained context in which the rise of one group imperiled the position of other groups. A disposition on the part of the state and social groups to compromise and accommodation, crucial to liberal democracy, was less likely than in a dynamically expanding economy.

The continuous perception of the threat of war, the ubiquity of the uniformed Kantonists, and the pervasiveness of the military administrators contributed to the formation of a cultural and ideological system supportive of the preeminence of the military. Military systems as well as economic ones engender ideologies that justify privations and social inequities. War and preparation for it became accepted parts of life. What other nations saw as crushing burdens on productive forces and an aberration of human behavior were widely admired. The standing army, argued one defender,

<sup>42</sup> Carsten, *Origins of Prussia*, p. 266. However, the peculation inhering in French tax-farming and the efficiency of Prussian *Steuerräte* meant that a greater proportion of extractions reached Berlin. See also Kitchen, *Military History of Germany*, p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> Poor soil and high taxes for war might go a long way in explaining different levels of economic growth in England and Prussia. Cf. Robert Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe," in Aston and Philpin, *The Brenner Debate*, pp. 10–63.

creates many employment opportunities, and becomes a stimulus to agriculture and industry alike. . . . Even the peace-time standing army provides an opportunity to exercise certain qualities, and to develop certain capacities, which would atrophy but for the existence of standing armies, though they are important and beneficial to mankind. I reckon among these not only the refinement of the sense of honor, the training of the intellect, and the sharp eye for reality which differentiate officers from other members of the upper class; but the common soldier also benefits from military service through the improvement of his physique in strength and endurance; a better appreciation of the value of discipline, precision, activity, and subordination; and an enlargement of his intellectual horizons. The peasant who has spent several years with the colors is usually a better peasant for that very reason.

And war itself served the ends of not only the king, but also Providence. Were it not for war, one pious author wondered,

How degenerate would the human race become! The Creator . . . sporadically requires the scourge of war in order to prevent serious outbreaks of immorality in the world. War shakes up the entire constitution of men; when the paroxysm is over they feel their weakness and moderate their sensuous drives. The long-prevalent spirit of frivolity is broken; there arises, at least for a time, a more serious way of looking at the world; there is a revival of the feeling for religion and for virtue; and men resume the search for the Unknown God.<sup>44</sup>

The Prussian state fostered respect for the martial virtues by expenditures on parks with military symbolism, heroic statues of generals, and depiction of battles on the facades of public buildings. Military success, from Hermann's defeat of the Roman legions in the Teutoberger forest to Moltke's victory at Sedan, became centerpieces of a state semiotics, impressed onto the consciousness and identity of Prussians and Germans. In time, military monuments were built by popular initiative. Each facade, statue, and newly minted coin reminded the Prussian that his homeland was safe only by virtue of constant military readiness and the privations upon which the army was based.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Quotes from Klaus Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 290–92. In my view, these sentiments fall short, in scope and intensity, of the glorification of war and death during the National Socialist period. Nazi ideology drew at least as much from Volkish antimodernism, in any case. See George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Universal, 1964).

<sup>45</sup> See George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York: Meridian, 1977). Military symbols pervade English and American cities, too, so the distinction is one of degree; but in contrast, Dutch art frequently depicted soldiers in a rather unflattering way. See Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpre-*



Military victory became the basic edifice of legitimacy for the state. Victory justified heavy taxation and loss of personal freedom, transforming them from mundane burdens into transcendent national duties. Military success also served as the foundation of emerging sentiments of nationalism: as old loyalties to Prussia's constitutive duchies and provinces dissolved, Hohenzollern successes on the field of battle, where peasants, town dwellers, and nobles of various provinces had fought, helped to develop common affective ties. As the army became the centerpiece of Prussian state, society, and nationalism, the military profession took on enhanced social prestige. "The great social importance of the reserve officer was the penetration of military thinking and values into the civilian life. In this way we can speak of a militarization of the German educated middle class."<sup>46</sup> By the nineteenth century, military service, in the standing army or at least in the huge reserve corps, was an essential part of the career pattern of the average member of the middle class.<sup>47</sup> From popular consciousness to the educated bourgeoisie (*Bildungsbürgertum*), from prevalent values we might call common sense to treatises from the faculties of philosophy at Berlin and Königsberg, a neo-stoicist view held that true freedom was an inner matter, independent of external political institutions, lying not in the miasma of the individual, but in obedience to the state, which field marshal and *Privatdozent* alike imbued with metaphysical sanctity and teleological legitimation.<sup>48</sup> While Whig historians in England interpreted history as unilinear progress toward parliamentary democracy and individual freedom, German historicism saw and approved the culmination of German history in the Prussian state. The Unification of 1871 had the same sacred teleology as the Glorious Revolution of 1688.<sup>49</sup>

*tation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Ages* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 221–57.

<sup>46</sup> Karl Erich Born, "Structural Changes in German Social and Economic Development at the End of the Nineteenth Century," in James J. Sheehan, ed., *Imperial Germany* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976), p. 26.

<sup>47</sup> See James J. Sheehan, "Conflict and Cohesion Among German Elites in the Nineteenth Century," in Sheehan, ed., *Imperial Germany*, p. 77; Hans Ulrich Wehler, *Der deutsche Kaiserreich 1871–1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), pp. 122–31; Gerhard Ritter, *The Sword and the Scepter: The Problem of Militarism in Germany*, Volume 1: *The Prussian Tradition, 1740–1890* (Miami, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1969); and Emilio Willems, *A Way of Life and Death: Three Centuries of Prussian-German Militarism—An Anthropological Approach* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1986), pp. 72–98.

<sup>48</sup> See Leonard Krieger, *The German Idea of Freedom: History of a Political Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 46–80. Nicholas Karamzin, the great historian of the Russian state, held that "freedom is where there is regulation." Quoted in James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1970), p. 263.

<sup>49</sup> See Georg Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of His-*

The mobilization of the population and economic resources begun by the Great Elector was but the first phase of the state's assumption of a managerial position vis-à-vis civil society. The dearth of resources in Prussia required the scope and intensity of this managerialism to be quite extensive. Accordingly, the state began to squeeze out scarce resources, to determine more efficient methods of extraction, and also to develop or seize additional resources (commercial enterprises or adjacent territories) that would add to state coffers.

The central institution charged with this managerial duty was, not surprisingly, the Generalkriegskommissariat, or the General Directory as it was called in the eighteenth century. Rosenberg summarizes the managerial stance:

From the outset, the Prussian war commissars and their like . . . did not confine their work to military administration. They also . . . subjected social and economic life to steadily growing regimentation. In this blending of the management of military and civil affairs and in the methodical subordination of civil government to military considerations lies the distinctively militaristic character of Prussian public administration.<sup>50</sup>

And Hintze adds:

Dieselben Behörden, die für die Unterhaltung des Heeres, für das Aufkommen der Steuern zu sorgen haben, werden auch für die Erhaltung und Entwicklung des Wohlstandes und der Steuerkraft der Bevölkerung, vor allem für die Aufnahme der städtischen Nahrungen und des Verkehrs verantwortlich gemacht.<sup>51</sup>

The principal reason for this management of the national economy lies in war and preparing for it, but doubly so. After the destruction of the wars of the eighteenth century, the state assumed the task of promoting economic recovery, a role that reinforced its position vis-à-vis the economy and led to the increased size of the state. After the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), Frederick the Great built ministries for the management of the nation's forest and mineralogical resources, as well as one for the su-

*torical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983).

<sup>50</sup> Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy*, pp. 37–38.

<sup>51</sup> "The same authorities that had responsibility for the maintenance of the army and for the collection of taxes also were made responsible for the maintenance and development of the prosperity and taxability of the population, above all for the nourishment of the towns and for the care of commerce." Hintze, "Der Commissarius und seine Bedeutung," pp. 233–34. As late as 1914, one German historian characterized his country as an "heroic-aristocratic warrior state in which everything—taxation, officialdom, economy, society—revolved around the army, was determined by the needs of the army." Quoted in Fritz Fischer, *From Kaiserreich to Third Reich: Elements of Continuity in German History 1871–1945*, Roger Fletcher, trans. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), p. 39.



pervision and encouragement of overseas commerce.<sup>52</sup> Engineers, architects, and scientists were organized into a state academy through which the state could better control the economy.<sup>53</sup> Roads, bridges, and canals, what one might today call the economy's infrastructure, were built to facilitate communication and troop movements. It is a telling point that the German discipline *Verwaltungsgeschichte* (administrative history) has no counterpart in American or English historiography.

English agricultural technique (*verbesserte Englische Wirtschaft*) was studied by the appropriate ministry and practiced on the crown's demesne before being introduced onto Junker estates. This led to the agricultural sector's emulation of the English, but hardly to a gentry-dominated polity, only to more statism.<sup>54</sup> Protection of nascent textile and metallurgical industries began as early as 1684 and continued throughout the next centuries, as new industries critical to military power emerged.<sup>55</sup> State ownership of industry and investment in new factories, banks, and mines was routine. Armament and munitions plants were owned by the state, but daily operation was conducted by the state's partner and consultant in the private sector, Splitgerber und Daum, a firm that also benefited enormously from dealings with the economics ministry, which gave them numerous lucrative trade monopolies.<sup>56</sup> Large-scale

<sup>52</sup> Carsten, *Origins of Prussia*, pp. 260–65; Oestreich, *Friedrich Wilhelm I.*, pp. 62–70; W. O. Henderson, *Studies in the Economic Policy of Frederick the Great* (London: Frank Cass, 1963), pp. 38–84, 157–59; Johnson, *Frederick the Great and His Officials*, pp. 188–242; C.B.A. Behrens, *Society, Government, and the Enlightenment: The Experiences of Eighteenth-Century France and Prussia* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), pp. 116–51.

<sup>53</sup> Johnson, *Frederick the Great and His Officials*, pp. 232–37. The author entitles this section, "Science: Captive of the State."

<sup>54</sup> Hans-Heinrich Müller, "Domänen und Domänenpächter in Brandenburg-Preussen im 18. Jahrhundert," in Büsch and Neugebauer, *Moderne preußische Geschichte*, Volume 1, pp. 316–59; Johnson, *Frederick the Great and His Officials*, pp. 237–41.

<sup>55</sup> See Hugo Rachel, "Merkantilismus in Brandenburg-Preußen," in Büsch and Neugebauer, *Moderne preußische Geschichte*, Volume 2, pp. 951–93; for the nineteenth century, see Ulrich Peter Ritter, "Preußische Gewerbeförderung in früh-industrieller Zeit," in Büsch and Neugebauer, *Moderne Preußische Geschichte*, Volume 2, pp. 1031–87; Theodore S. Hamerow, *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction: Economics and Politics in Germany, 1815–1871* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 3–20; and W. O. Henderson, *The State and the Industrial Revolution in Prussia, 1740–1870* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1967). A curious law aimed at protecting the textile industry limited the mourning period, during which drab attire was normally worn for several weeks. See Reinhold August Dorwart, *The Prussian Welfare State before 1740* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 41–48.

<sup>56</sup> See Henderson, *Economic Policy of Frederick the Great*, pp. 2–7, 17–37, 157–59; Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 148–49. The role of the military in the economy declined with the liberalization of the economy in the nineteenth century but continued in some form into the twentieth century, especially during World

investment in the national economy there was, but the Hohenzollerns always retained huge monetary reserves. From a purely economic viewpoint, these would have been better used as injections into the circular flow, but monetary reserves were critical in case of war.<sup>57</sup>

Prussia faced a dearth of human as well as economic resources. Accordingly, foreign immigrants from Bohemia, the Swiss Confederation, and other German territories, as well as religious refugees, especially Huguenots and Jews, were encouraged to settle in Prussia, often in war-ravaged regions. They provided valuable entrepreneurial and commercial skills relatively lacking in the indigenous populace. They composed an "imported artificial bourgeoisie" (*importiertes Ersatzbürgertum*). By 1786 the state had settled over three hundred thousand émigrés (a sizeable portion of the total population) on Prussian soil in the hope that their labor would yield surplus to the state.<sup>58</sup>

Managerialism on the part of the Prussian state is not without parallels in the political and economic histories of countries that became liberal democracies, most notably England. In fact, most European states went through a period of mercantilism during which state policy sought to develop the economy and state revenue. The Prussian case is distinguishable from English mercantilism in three regards. First, the scope and intensity of the Prussian state's control of the economy exceeded those of Tudor and early Stuart England, the peak of mercantilism there. The English crown exerted no control over agriculture; international commerce was affected but hardly dominated by royal monopolies; and royal industry remained only in shipbuilding and a few other sectors. Second, the institutional apparatus for managing the economy wielded by the eighteenth-century Prussian state greatly dwarfed that of England. English monarchs had neither the local nor the central organs to implement a policy as ambitious as that embarked upon in Prussia. Furthermore,

War I and the Rationalization movement of the interwar period. Its end came only with the complete destruction of the German state in 1945 and the allied powers' policy of breaking the state's commanding heights over the economy. See Gerald D. Feldman, *Army, Industry, and Labor in Germany 1914–1918* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966); Robert A. Brady, *The Rationalization Movement in German Industry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1933); and Andrew Shonfeld, *Modern Capitalism: The Changing Balance of Public and Private Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 239–64.

<sup>57</sup> See Henderson, *Economic Policy of Frederick the Great*, pp. 74–75, 160.

<sup>58</sup> Walter L. Dorn, "The Prussian Bureaucracy in the Eighteenth Century, I," *Political Science Quarterly* 46 (1931): 404. On the settlement programs, see Stefi Jersch-Wenzel, "Minderheiten in der preußischen Gesellschaft," in Büsch and Neugebauer, *Moderne preußische Geschichte*, Volume 1, pp. 486–506; Gustav Schmoller, "Die ländliche Kolonisation des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts," in Büsch and Neugebauer, *Moderne preußische Geschichte*, Volume 2, pp. 911–50; and Behrens, *Society, Government, and the Enlightenment*, pp. 123–25.



English mercantilism was decided in conjunction with or at least subject to the approval of Parliament. Finally, the matter of timing is important. Whereas mercantilism had declined or even vanished in much of Western Europe by the eighteenth century, in Prussia it was still spreading into newly acquired territories and more deeply into old ones. Common to all these factors is the economy's role of supporting the army: "Die Wirtschaft blieb ihm immer Mittel zu dem Zweck, den Staat stark in Militärmacht und Finanzen zu machen."<sup>59</sup> This placed the polity and economy of Prussia and Germany more firmly and irreversibly on their special path.

State managerialism was not without beneficial aspects. Beginning in the early eighteenth century, and continuing into the next, the state enacted numerous laws and regulations aimed at preserving the social position of the peasantry. *Bauernschutz* laws tried to protect the peasant from increased labor demands of his lord and from attempts to expand manors at the expense of peasants who had retained some property. The aim of these laws was not ultimately the protection of the peasantry, or even preventing the aggrandizement of the nobility; rather they aimed to preserve the orderly extraction of revenues upon which the army depended.<sup>60</sup> The Great Elector and his successors (most notably Friedrich Wilhelm I and Frederick the Great) directed the resources of the state to matters of public sanitation, to the suppression of quackery, and even to efforts at public education that preceded similar efforts elsewhere in Europe by a full century.<sup>61</sup> Torture was abolished in civilian criminal proceedings. Owing to its huge stockpiles of grain against the event of war, the state was able to regulate food prices, the vicissitudes of which fomented riots elsewhere in Europe, including England.<sup>62</sup>

There is some controversy over the motivation for these welfare programs. Some argue that the king's paternal concern (*väterliche Sorgen*) with the welfare of his subjects was critical. This is not as farfetched as it might seem. Absolutist states, at least when ruled by an autocrat and not by soulless bureaucracy, are capable of enlightened policies, providing the appropriate values are firmly rooted in the autocrat presiding over the state, as they surely were in Frederick the Great. Still, Hintze's explanation seems more important: "The cultural purpose and the welfare

<sup>59</sup> "The economy remained to him [the king] always a means to an end: the strengthening of the military and financial power of the state." Rachel, "Merkantilismus," p. 961.

<sup>60</sup> See Büsch, *Militärsystem und Sozialleben*, pp. 72–73; and Kitchen, *Military History of Germany*, pp. 12–13. The Junkers were able to limit implementation of these laws at the local level, however.

<sup>61</sup> Dorwart, *The Prussian Welfare State*, pp. 77–90.

<sup>62</sup> Gerhard Ritter, *Frederick the Great* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 178–79.

purpose receded before the power purpose . . . Raison d'état dominated in all areas."<sup>63</sup> The state established public education in the eighteenth century in order to inculcate respect for authority and to improve the productivity of the docile peasantry. Pietism was used to inculcate deference to authority, divine and secular, as this excerpt from a school catechism shows:

Q: From whence comes the power held by the ruler?

A: This power comes from God.

Q: Whom does God ordain?

A: Everyone who holds authority. Because all who exercise authority are ordained by God, subjects must be submissive, loyal, and obedient. . . .

Q: What does it mean to resist authority?

A: To resist authority is to rebel against the divine order.

Q: What happens to those who do not submit to authority?

A: They will suffer eternal damnation.<sup>64</sup>

Welfare policies served to expand state control and, by keeping the public in optimal economic and medical health, to make administration and tax collection smoother and more predictable. The state intruded on the lives of its subjects in numerous ways that hardly helped their social welfare. Laws regulated wedding festivities, dress styles, the hours of drinking establishments, and social mores. The object of this sumptuary legislation was to restrict frivolous expenditures in order to ensure tax revenues, and also to channel the public's energies into more regimented and manageable behavior.<sup>65</sup>

Managerialism contained a logic favorable to imperialist expansion. A powerful organization charged with obtaining resources for national defense looked to weak neighbors as potential sources of revenue and material. When succession troubles weakened the Habsburgs in 1740, Prussia boldly annexed the geopolitically attractive and economically rich region of Silesia. Other annexations continued until the Unification. This move effectively closed a circle in the logic of the European state system:

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Dorwart, *The Prussian Welfare State*, p. 17. See also Frederick's essay on the humanistic responsibilities of the crown, *Anti-Machiavel* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981); G. P. Gooch, *Frederick the Great: The Ruler, the Writer, the Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947); and Dorn, *Competition for Empire*, pp. 137–41. Weber argues that the Hohenzollerns, like the Roman emperors of antiquity, protected the peasantry in order to maintain a supply of able soldiers. See *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations*, R. I. Frank, trans. (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 405–6.

<sup>64</sup> From James Van Horn Melton, *Absolutism and the Eighteenth-Century Origins of Compulsory Schooling in Prussia and Austria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 186. See also Willems, *Prussian-German Militarism*, pp. 85–87.

<sup>65</sup> See Dorwart, *The Prussian Welfare State*, pp. 1–50; and Tuttle, *History of Prussia*, pp. 465–68.



Prussian policies of defense from foreign conquest led to the ruthless mobilization of domestic resources, and then to the seizure of foreign ones, which entailed Prussia itself becoming a threat to other European states.<sup>66</sup>

### THE STATE AND POLITICS

The destruction of constitutional government and the rise of powerful state structures shaped the pattern of politics in ensuing centuries. Party politics, the potential for democratic development, and the rise of legitimate opposition were all stifled, often as a conscious policy of the state. Furthermore, the state was able to avoid or emerge largely intact from the crises that destroyed absolutism elsewhere in Europe. Though managerialism declined and some concessions to liberalism were made, the state maintained its position at the helm of society.

Prussia entered the nineteenth century without local or national elections, except for those in the provinces it annexed and over which it predominated. Corrupt as the most rotten borough in England was, it still provided a measure of representation, limits on monarchical power, as well as an object for which social groups and their political parties could compete. There was something for parties to grab on to, so to speak; with which to establish themselves as popular voices, political blocs, and obstacles to royal power. In Prussia, however, the absence of national representative government, at least until the mid-nineteenth century, decisively retarded the development of party politics. There was little reason to devote one's time and money to political activity that had no office to win and little if any bargaining power with a powerful state bureaucracy. Even after the introduction of a feckless parliament and some municipal autonomy in the nineteenth century, the state rode roughshod over them.<sup>67</sup> Parties remained weak but interest groups were much stronger. A state-society dialogue took place not in a constitutionally guaranteed parliamentary body, but in a less institutionalized yet politically significant setting. The state, as we have seen, needed the support of the nobility for the army and civil service, and formed pacts with it. By the mid-nineteenth century, a mutual dependence came into being between state and industry. Industrialists needed legal innovations to manage growing industrial corporations more effectively, and the state knew well that military might rested increasingly on a modern industrial base, on iron as well as blood. Accordingly, the state gave its ear to more and more in-

<sup>66</sup> See Dorn, *Competition for Empire*, pp. 137–41; Johnson, *Frederick the Great and His Officials*, pp. 167–83; and Christopher Duffy, *Frederick the Great: A Military Life* (London: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>67</sup> Wehler, *Deutsche Kaiserreich*, pp. 78–90.

dustrial groups. Much of what the English middle classes accomplished in Parliament, their German counterparts accomplished through interest groups.<sup>68</sup>

The state was not the passive instrument of the monarch, obsequiously implementing his orders. Owing to common educational experiences, cooperation on day-to-day matters of policy and routine, and concentration in Berlin, a corporate identity emerged among officials, which transformed them from the fearful, atomized functionaries that Frederick had hoped to maintain, into a consciously autonomous set of actors with interests of their own and considerable resources: a *Staat für sich*. Officials were at first able to affect monarchical policy by fighting rearguard actions:

By using mainly indirect methods, the managers of the administrative and judicial apparatus were able to circumvent and counteract royal decisions and orders and to paralyze the execution of policy. They were equipped with the very real power to obstruct and to divert. They practiced passive resistance through inertia, chicanery, and sophistry. They influenced policy making and steered policy enforcement into channels more desirable to themselves by withholding facts or by supplying colored information to their employer. . . . [T]hey . . . carried out unauthorized policies of their own by amending, undermining, or altogether emasculating royal directives.<sup>69</sup>

The upshot of these intrigues, when combined with a monarch lacking in the personal strength of Frederick, was the bureaucracy's wresting power from the crown in the years following Frederick's death in 1786. There was at this juncture no one to guard the guardians. From this position, the state was able consciously to pattern basic political processes.

The power of the state, the fusion of key social classes to it, and the absence of elective offices combined to bring about a client-patron relationship between social groups and the state. The apparatus was not an object that could be won through consensus building in the Reichstag,

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 90–95; David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Jeffrey M. Diefendorf, *Businessmen and Politics in the Rhineland, 1789–1834* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980); Hans-Jürgen Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preußischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich (1893–1914): Ein Beitrag zur Analyse des Nationalismus in Deutschland am Beispiel des Bundes der Landwirte und der Deutsch-Konservativen Partei* (Bonn: Neue Gesellschaft, 1975).

<sup>69</sup> Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy*, p. 193. It is interesting to note that these actions took place during the reign of Frederick the Great (r. 1740–1786), a time thought by many to have been the peak of personal autocracy. Frederick's tragic dilemma was that he needed a larger state, but, the larger it got, the more difficult it was to control. See Johnson, *Frederick the Great and His Officials*. On continuity into the next century, see John R. Gillis, *The Prussian Bureaucracy in Crisis, 1840–1860: Origins of an Administrative Ethos* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1971).



but client groups could negotiate and obtain favors. The state exploited this relationship in two related ways. It disarmed increasingly powerful groups by granting them desired programs. This was a curious dynamic that in a sense demonstrated a measure of power; however, inasmuch as the groups typically receded from further challenges, they obtained no institutional political power, and left the state's preeminence intact. Such was the case with the famous battleship construction that, insofar as the fleet could never challenge England's, made little sense from a strategic point of view, and in fact was a waste of resources; nevertheless, it did serve to placate key social groups and diffuse growing political challenge.<sup>70</sup> Second, the state could play upon divisions within oppositional coalitions. The events of 1848 illustrate a divide-and-conquer stratagem. The state faced a serious challenge from diverse social groups, united, at least for a while, by common opposition to the government. Owing to the state's playing for time and negotiating separate arrangements with artisans, peasants, and other factions, the opposition lost unity and dissolved without realizing its goals.

The enormous power prestige the state acquired through military success, especially after 1871, made it the central, most cognitively important image in Prussian nationalism. Though the nationalist pantheon of Prussia and Germany contained exhibits of Goethe and Schiller, the most popular and prominent ones were those of Frederick, Moltke, and other military leaders. This virtual coincidence of nationalist imagery with the state was an effective weapon against domestic opposition. International tensions, it has been argued, were intentionally exacerbated to ease social and political tensions, diverting attention from present internal conflicts to a potential nation-threatening one. Opposition was delegitimized and discredited by being projected as agents or dupes of the enemy.<sup>71</sup>

Working-class organizations also encountered obstacles posed by na-

<sup>70</sup> See Eckart Kehr, *Battleship Building and Party Politics in Germany, 1894–1901*, Pauline R. Anderson and Eugene N. Anderson, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Bismarck's Imperialism, 1862–1890," in Sheehan, *Imperial Germany*, pp. 180–222; Otto Hintze, "Military Organization and the Organization of the State," in Felix Gilbert, ed., *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 180–215. Hintze writes (p. 183), "Conflict between nations . . . has even often suppressed internal strife or forced it into compromise."

<sup>71</sup> See Wehler, *Deutsche Kaiserreich*, p. 108; and Geoff Eley, "State Formation, Nationalism, and Political Culture: Some Thoughts on the Unification of Germany," in his *From Unification to Nazism: Reinterpreting the German Past* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986), pp. 61–84. It is useful to note the difference between German social imperialism, in which Bismarck and the state were very much in control, and the Russian example, in which the state was delegitimized after defeat and propelled by domestic considerations to engage in new foreign adventures, for which it was ill-prepared and that had disastrous consequences. See Dietrich Geyer, *Russian Imperialism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977).

tionalism. Party organizers attempted to build a counterculture separate from the dominant, militarist one, but found many leaders as well as the rank and file breaking away from much-repeated but weakly held values of internationalism. Leaders and workers overwhelmingly supported the war in 1914. The speech of a social democrat leader conveys the problem of building a coherent oppositional party within the context of German nationalism, as well as the guilt attendant on affiliation with a party opposed to the state:

I shall never forget the day and hour—the terrible tension was resolved; until one dared to be what one was; until—despite all principles and wooden theories—one could, for the first time in almost a quarter century, join with a full heart, a clean conscience and without a sense of treason in the sweeping stormy song: "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles". . . .<sup>72</sup>

[W]e have learned anew what we had almost completely forgotten: that apart from the class conflicts within a nation there is something common to *all classes of the nation*. We German Social Democrats have learned to consider ourselves in this war as part . . . of the German nation. We do not want to be robbed again by anyone, from the right or the left, of this feeling of belonging to the German people.<sup>73</sup>

Their loyalties stronger to the Reich than to the SPD, workers charged headlong into the catastrophe in 1914, shattering another grand illusion.

The military-centered state, then, was a sprawling giant that was not substantially changed by domestic forces and had no internal impetus toward liberal reform. Peaceful, gradual change was taken off the agenda by the bureaucracy's strength and ability to control domestic opposition. The historical evidence indicates that military-centered states have considerable momentum, and are decisively altered only by the alienation of elites, peasant revolution, fiscal crisis, or complete military defeat—and normally by a conjuncture of more than one of these. Elite alienation was unlikely owing to the nobility's fusion with the military and bureaucracy, as well as its growing dependency on various forms of economic protectionism during the nineteenth century. The middle classes, too, had no great conflict with the institutions that had erected tariff barriers, directly invested in many firms, and were principal purchasers of industrial out-

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Carl Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1970), p. 290.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Gunther Roth, *The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany: A Study in Working-Class Isolation and National Integration* (Totowa, N.J.: Bedminster Press, 1963), p. 289 (emphasis in original). See also Barrington Moore, Jr., *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1978), pp. 221–26.



put. Their protests of 1848 were weak, short-lived, and almost inconsequential for constitutional history.

Peasant revolution might seem to be more likely owing to extreme oppression and the absence of a social escape valve through emigration. However, local peasant organization that might have served as a means of organizing revolt (which could have become revolution if timed with the events of 1806 or 1848) had been shattered by the manorial reaction of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Junkers exercised close administrative control over their field workers, thereby posing a serious though not necessarily insurmountable problem for organization. Oppression on the manors was reinforced by the presence of nearby garrisons and by the peasant's integration into the Kantonsystem. Though we might conceive of the Prussian peasantry as a relatively undifferentiated social class suppressed by Junker landlords, there was actually a significant degree of stratification, precluding solidarity. Gradations ranged from the serfs (*Instleute*) tied to the lord's estate, to the sharecroppers and tenant farmers (*Zinsleute*) who were free of labor service to the lord, to the prosperous, free farmers (*Kölmer*) of East Prussia.<sup>74</sup> And this is to say nothing of the gradations in the regions annexed by Prussia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Prussia was able to maintain fiscal solvency and avoid state paralysis and collapse principally by means of the harsh extraction of revenue from the country. Revenue came into the *Kriegskasse* without passing through the greedy hands of venal officeholders, a problem of paramount importance in the Bourbon revenue system. Revenue was enhanced over the years by the addition or conquest of adjacent lands. Prussia also benefited from subsidies from allies, most notably England and the Netherlands, who were pleased to purchase or rent another army to hold the French in check. It is critical that Prussia did not overextend its financial resources in dubious alliances, by bankrolling far-flung conflicts, or by acquiring remote, indefensible colonies. The Hohenzollerns wisely limited their attention to Central Europe and left the Mediterranean and the Americas to others. In so doing, they consolidated a powerful region in

<sup>74</sup> On stratification within the Prussian peasantry, see Marion W. Gray, "Prussia in Transition: Society and Politics under the Stein Reform Ministry of 1808," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 76, part 1 (1986): 19–21; Berdahl, *Politics of the Prussian Nobility*, pp. 28–43; and Behrens, *Society, Government, and the Enlightenment*, pp. 140–42. My views on peasant politics have obviously benefited greatly from the works of Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins*; James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1976); and Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolution: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

the heart of Europe and avoided the sort of costly, dangerous adventures that led in part to the demise of French absolutism.

Prussia avoided military defeat throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—although during the Seven Years' War complete defeat seemed inevitable, even to Frederick, who it is said came close to suicide. Prussia was saved from defeat and dismemberment only by the last-minute collapse of the enemy coalition. Napoleon's devastating victory over the Prussians at Jena and Auerstädt (1806) led to the occupation of the western parts of the country, the government's evacuation of Berlin, and a political crisis that fortunately did not coincide with popular unrest or elite disaffection. Complete occupation was avoided owing to the existence of sufficient tension between France and Russia—a fortuitous circumstance that gave the state time and room to maneuver.<sup>75</sup>

The state introduced substantial political, economic, and military reforms that, if fully implemented, would have altered basic political relationships. The army came under pressure to adopt reforms modeled after the seemingly invincible troops of Napoleon: a mobilization of the nation in exchange for basic political rights. Gneisenau (as von Bülow had even before the French Revolution) called for a free constitution, independent town governments, and civil rights. "It is both fair and shrewd," he argued, "for the people to be given a Fatherland if they are to defend a Fatherland."<sup>76</sup> The army introduced reforms affording greater opportunities for advancement by middle-class officers, and built decentralized military formations (*Landsturm*, *Landwehr*, and *Jäger*) outside the normal army command structures, which had the radical innovation of elected officers.

Although the reform period has been the object of numerous studies, most of the reforms, such as those that introduced laissez-faire and freed the peasantry, either were never fully implemented or were reversed after the crisis ended with Waterloo. The state remained preeminent. Conservative elements entrenched in the bureaucracy reasserted themselves and disbanded newly created units or gradually merged them with the regular army. One lasting effect of what the army saw as interloping in its sacred traditions was its mistrust of popular pressures and reform

<sup>75</sup> On the reform period, see Peter Paret, *Yorck and the Era of Prussian Reform 1807–15* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966); Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 187–96; Geoffrey Best, *War and Society in Revolutionary Europe, 1770–1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 150–67; Kitchen, *Military History of Germany*, pp. 53–101; and Gray, "Prussia in Transition."

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Krieger, *German Idea of Freedom*, p. 200. Clausewitz was more cautious, favoring a *levée en masse* but no constitution; that is, military but not political-constitutional change.



in general: "The effect of these changes was again to cut the army off from the rest of society, and in an age which was relatively peaceful the main concern of military policy became the 'enemy within.' The army became consciously an instrument of domestic oppression."<sup>77</sup> The state withstood the political crisis of the Napoleonic era without radically altering its political trajectory. The only lasting change was the overthrow of an *autocratic* absolutism and its replacement by a *bureaucratic* one, a change with more interest for administrative than constitutional history; the military-bureaucratic core emerged essentially intact from the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>78</sup>

...

Mobilization of domestic resources for the wars of the seventeenth century destroyed Prussian constitutionalism and set into motion the development of a military-bureaucratic absolutism whose contacts with society were mainly administration and machicolation. The Prussian state attained a high level of autonomy from the society beneath it. Fundamental political change in military-bureaucratic absolutisms comes only from massive peasant revolution, complete military defeat, fiscal collapse, and deep alienation of elite social classes—situations that Prussia (but, as will be seen, not France) was able to avoid. It was the state's good fortune and Germany's fate that none of these would arise until the twentieth century.

<sup>77</sup> Kitchen, *Military History of Germany*, p. 69. On Landsturm, Landwehr, and Jäger units, see also Paret, *Prussian Reform*, pp. 154–255; Best, *War and Society*, pp. 161–67; and Hans Kohn, *Prelude to Nation-States: The French and German Experience, 1789–1815* (Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand, 1967), pp. 212–88.

<sup>78</sup> On the failures of the Prussian reform movement following the Napoleonic Wars, see Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy*, p. 208; and Best, *War and Society*, pp. 207–22.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### France

MEDIEVAL FRANCE shared many of the constitutional features of other European countries, with the notable but not paramount absence of a strong national estates. The Hundred Years' War led to a somewhat modern but rather small military organization that was realized without destroying the consensual framework of king and estates. The new army of the later fifteenth century still being small, there was no showdown. France's entry into the Thirty Years' War, however, required immense revenues for a modern army equal to those of Spain and the Holy Roman Empire. Domestic resource mobilization precipitated circumvention but not complete destruction of parlements and provincial estates. By 1700 France and Brandenburg-Prussia resembled each other in critical ways: each had centralized state structures that forcibly levied and collected taxes without the approval of the estates; each state decisively patterned its country's economic, political, and social histories.

Yet French political history does not parallel that of Prussia and Germany in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There was halting movement in the direction of democracy. The resolution to this apparent paradox of a military-bureaucratic absolutism and a liberal democratic outcome lies in the collapse of the Bourbon state in the late eighteenth century. Similar themes and movements in the two countries' history ended with the cacophonous coda of the Revolution. French absolutism, unlike that of Prussia, was brought down by structural and fiscal problems. The Revolution of 1789 provided the possibility of breaking from the Prussian trajectory and making progress in the direction of a liberal political outcome.

### FRENCH CONSTITUTIONALISM

The steady expansion of French kings from the Ile de France is a remarkable process that need not be recapitulated here. Capetian and Valois territorial acquisitions, made at the expense of independent duchies and counties, suggest for present purposes that the French state was more powerful than contemporary Prussian or English ones. Doubtless so, but it would be unwarranted to conclude there was no comparable pattern of constitutional government in the medieval and early modern periods.



## CHAPTER SIX

## Poland

BRANDENBURG-PRUSSIA and France responded to the military revolution by building autocratic state structures to mobilize domestic resources and field a large modern army. Other countries in this study either faced relatively light military threats or avoided harsh domestic resource mobilization by various specific means: mobilization of foreign resources, the benefit of geographical advantages, international alliances, or the wealth of an advanced commercial economy. The history of Poland demonstrates the tragic consequences of failing to build an effective response to modernized enemy armies. Polish constitutionalism was the privilege of a large, lesser nobility whose number, paralyzing institutions, and diverse loyalties prevented any measure of state centralization and military reform, until it was too late. The price was loss of sovereignty.

Though aided for the better part of the seventeenth century by alliances and subsidies, Poland entered the following century without them, and stood alone against a unified alliance of absolutisms, whose capacity for cooperation lay only in partitioning a helpless neighbor. Without natural defenses, alliances, or the ability to mobilize foreign resources, or without domestic resource mobilization and a modern army, constitutional government in Poland had little, if any, opportunity for survival. Independence was lost and the land was divided among the great powers of the region. It should be no surprise that Poland was partitioned by powers that had learned the lessons of the military revolution. Prussia, Russia, and Austria overwhelmed the backward military of Poland, and removed it from contemporary maps of Europe.

## GENTRY CONSTITUTIONALISM

In the fourteenth century, the Piast dynasty imposed a weak monarchical order over the Slavic tribes of Eastern Europe. Although it was able to avoid substantive ties of fealty to either the Holy Roman Empire or the Papacy, it failed to construct any measure of central control parallel to that of Angevin England or Augustan France.<sup>1</sup> A constitutional balance, however, was in evidence between the crown on the one hand and the

magnates and gentry (*szlachta*), whose assistance in governing the expansive region was vital.<sup>2</sup>

It is the *szlachta* who figure so highly in the unfolding of Polish history, and it should be noted that, even at this early point, their power relative to the throne was considerable. Their role in thwarting centralization and military reform in ensuing centuries was predicated on their beginnings as a strong, cohesive knightly class, whose military functions had not waned, as had those of many counterparts to the west. The knights were organized not as individual families, but rather as clans. Such was the import of this system that a knight assumed as his last name a part of his clan's battle cry. Though widely dispersed throughout the sprawling realm, clans had considerable contact with their members and constituted formidable political entities with which the crown had to reckon.<sup>3</sup>

A classic medieval constitutional pact, reminiscent of Magna Carta or the Swedish Land Law of 1350, was negotiated in 1374. The Pact of Koszyce won for the crown the succession of the king's daughter in exchange for limiting noble taxes to a mere two groschen per year, no other taxes without *szlachta* approval, gentry control of the judiciary and mint, and, critically, future accessions to the throne only by means of election.<sup>4</sup> The inequity of this exchange is indicative of existing power relations between crown and nobility, which continued throughout the nation's history, and in no small way determined its ultimate demise.

The Pact of Koszyce's provision that new taxes had to be approved by the gentry naturally called for a diet (*Seym*) to discuss such matters. By 1520 the diet's procedures and structures had been established: diets met every four years, each member of the gentry was entitled to vote in the Seym, and a single negative vote could veto not only the bill under discussion, but also all acts of legislation adopted at that session of the Seym.<sup>5</sup> These last two provisions, the sheer numbers of the legislators and the so-called *Liberum Veto*, made the governmental machinery the

<sup>2</sup> *The Cambridge Medieval History*, Volume 6, pp. 451–52.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 462; W. F. Reddaway et al., eds., *The Cambridge History of Poland*, Volume 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), pp. 105–6. As we shall see, foreign sovereigns, too, reckoned with, and often manipulated, the *szlachta*.

<sup>4</sup> *The Cambridge Medieval History*, Volume 8, pp. 566–67; *The Cambridge History of Poland*, Volume 1, p. 193; Karol Górski, "Les chartes de la noblesse en Pologne aux XIVe et XVe siècles," *Studies Presented to the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions* 56 (1979): 247–72.

<sup>5</sup> *The Cambridge History of Poland*, Volume 1, pp. 320–21, 421–23; Volume 2, pp. 54–56; Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland in Two Volumes*, Volume 1: *The Origins to 1795* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 344–48. Seyms, like the French Estates-General, were preceded by smaller assemblies (*sejmiiks*) at the district and provincial levels.

<sup>1</sup> *The Cambridge Medieval History*, Volume 6, p. 447, Volume 8, p. 562.



most unwieldy in all Europe. In addition to routinized diets, an ad hoc diet, or *rokosz*, was frequently convoked on the occasion of calling up the feudal levy, thereby forcing concessions at critical moments. Pacts and concessions were worked out, including periodic reaffirmations of noble rights, gentry control of the judiciary, and supervision of the royal mint.<sup>6</sup> The szlachta built a substantial, but extremely cumbersome, constitutional order that firmly guaranteed their rights and liberties, at least from internal dangers. But it had tragic consequences for the country, as a weak, subordinate monarchy and unwieldy diets proved unable to respond adequately to external threats.

In 1572 the Jagiellonian dynasty died out, and with its passing came reassertion of the principle of elective monarchy, which had fallen into disuse. Though kings were often from the same families, the gentry maintained the upper hand, and rewarded an unobtrusive family with a dynastic facade. Each accession entailed solemn reaffirmation of traditional constitutional arrangements. Constitutional government took a decisive turn with the conjuncture of the demise of the Jagiellonians—the country's last chance for a strong monarchy—and the further rise of an independent social class, the gentry, now enriched by the Baltic grain trade.<sup>7</sup> The gentry had subordinated the monarchy, just as many histories say the English gentry had subordinated its monarchy in 1688. But celebration was not in order. Instead of signaling the triumph of the constitution, szlachta ascendancy was a death knell. England benefited from the Channel barrier, great commercial wealth, and plentiful foreign aid, but when Poland faced foreign threats in the eighteenth century, it was unprotected by nature, far from wealthy, and hopelessly alone. Perhaps most importantly, its diet-centered government lacked executive coherence. But that gets ahead of the narrative.

The peasantry and burghers of the late Middle Ages enjoyed most of the rights and privileges of their Prussian neighbors prior to the Great Elector's reforms. It could hardly be any other way, since both regions' towns and villages were founded during the same migration to the east. Peasants were attracted to Poland in the thirteenth century by the prospect of light services and dues. The village *solci*, like the etymologically related German Schulz, settled peasants, administered justice, and took

<sup>6</sup> *The Cambridge History of Poland*, Volume 1, pp. 313–14, 320–21, 419–21, Volume 2, pp. 57–68; Catherine S. Leach, ed., *Memoirs of the Polish Baroque: The Writings of Jan Chryzostom Pasek, A Squire of the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> "The Szlachta . . . now anointed themselves with the majesty that once belonged to the crown and looked upon their king as a chosen representative with strictly limited authority." *The Cambridge History of Poland*, Volume 1, p. 369.

up the cause of the villagers in disputes with the lord or crown.<sup>8</sup> Towns, meanwhile, were settled by merchants from the West, especially Jewish ones fleeing intolerance fueled by the fervor of the Crusades. Charters were obtained; aldermanic government and guild democracies flourished.<sup>9</sup>

#### GEOGRAPHIC DETERMINISM, POLITICAL STRUCTURE, AND POLAND'S DESTRUCTION

There is perhaps no more common and intuitively appealing explanation for Poland's dismemberment than the geographic-determinist one. According to this line of reasoning, fate, in the intransigent form of geography, placed Poland in an unviable position amidst three expansionist empires. To worsen matters, Poland was without the benefit of mountains or other natural barriers to invaders. Hence, physical realities foredoomed the republic of nobles to partition and extinction. The argument seems to have merit. As one surveys Polish history and sees absolutist armies partition the land, the scenario unfolds, and it seems ineluctably so. But one soon suspects an element of wounded national pride in this argument, and the suspicion is strengthened if one considers the poor geographic hands dealt to two other players in the game of European geopolitics.

Brandenburg, it will be remembered, was once a frail constitutional territory surrounded and exploited by Sweden, Austria, and Poland itself, whose military might prior to the military revolution was, as we shall see, sufficient to fight against other unmodernized armies. During the Thirty Years' War, foreign armies traversed Brandenburg and availed themselves of its resources with impunity. But from little Brandenburg emerged mighty Prussia, no longer a victim—quite the opposite. A powerful military state developed from a similar geographic disadvantage. Similarly, Austria was far from blessed by geography. It faced Ottoman invasions from the south, and French and Russian ones from the west and east.<sup>10</sup> Nor can one amend the determinist argument by claiming that Poland lacked the resources to defend itself. In the early seventeenth century, Poland was one of the largest countries in Europe, with a pop-

<sup>8</sup> *The Cambridge History of Poland*, Volume 1, pp. 104–5, 130–38. A further parallel with the Prussian peasantry is in the subjugation of both in the manorial reaction of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

<sup>9</sup> Davies, *God's Playground*, Volume 1, pp. 293–320; *The Cambridge History of Poland*, Volume 1, p. 105.

<sup>10</sup> On successful outcomes for countries starting with marked geopolitical disadvantages, see Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), pp. 88–92.



ulation of between eight and nine million, controlling a fertile agricultural region of 375,000 square miles from the Baltic to the Black Sea.<sup>11</sup> And its soil was far richer than that of Brandenburg, which was known as the sandbox of the Holy Roman Empire. Poland's geographic position, then, was no worse than that of Prussia and Austria, and probably no worse than those of most other continental states. Furthermore, its economic and human resources were far greater than those of Prussia; the nation's wealth, though never exorbitant, grew rapidly from grain trade with the West. One must look elsewhere for the answer to the question of why Poland lost its sovereignty.

The answer, I contend, lies in Prussia's and Austria's abilities, and Poland's failure, to build state structures capable of developing and fielding large modern armies. To put this in terms of the dynamics presented in this study, the crown in some countries was able to obtain a preponderance of organizational and military resources, abolish or circumvent the estates, and pursue policies of state centralization and militarization. Alternately, following the Dutch example, the estates themselves, or a portion thereof, assumed control of modern military structures and, with the assistance of international alliances, geographic alliances, and extraordinary commercial wealth, were able to form a viable executive and pass through periods of protracted warfare, without the onus of autocratic organizations.

Poland was unable to follow the military-bureaucratic pattern of France and Prussia for two principal reasons that stand out from the outlines of its constitutional history. First, the demise of the Jagiellonian dynasty combined with the rise of a wealthy, independent, and politically powerful gentry effectively took a military-bureaucratic outcome off the agenda. The constitutional balance had been upset, but in the opposite direction from the Prussian and French examples. The gentry had taken virtually complete control of government, and by the late sixteenth century the Polish king was little more than a subordinate steward of szlachta interests—an executive for managing the common affairs of the gentry, one might say, thus making monarchical absolutism highly improbable: “In the Age of Louis XIV and Peter I, a radical and total negation of Absolutism was born on the banks of the Vistula.”<sup>12</sup> There was no royal chancery independent of the diet, to recognize foreign danger and engineer the deals, threats, and maneuvers needed to rise above consensual rule with

<sup>11</sup> *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 1, p. 585.

<sup>12</sup> Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1974), p. 293. See also Jacek Kochanowicz, “The Polish Economy and the Evolution of Dependency,” in Daniel Chirot, ed., *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe: Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 92–130.

the estates and build military-bureaucratic absolutism. There was only a parsimonious, parochial, and incoherent estates with its elected king.

The second model, parliamentary control as exemplified by the Dutch regents and States-General, was not to be followed owing to the unwieldy numbers of the Polish Sejm, the paralyzing effects of the *Liberum Veto*, and the absence of unity and coherence among the gentry elite. First of all, although most European estates consisted of several hundred members, owing to the principle of representation of each member of the szlachta, the Sejm was far larger than any other European estates. The mass of the diets made effective decision making extremely difficult. Debates were interminable, directionless, and inconclusive. Second, the *Liberum Veto* was a serious obstacle to coherent and controversial policies such as those necessitated by protracted war, military reform, and centralization. The work of an entire diet could be undone by a single unexplained shout of “*Nie pozwalam*” (“I do not allow it”). The *Liberum Veto* limited the actions of crown and Sejm alike. Reform aimed at streamlining this absurd form of constitutional government could itself be thwarted by a single veto. Indeed, belated eighteenth-century reforms replacing the *Liberum Veto* with the reasonable and constitutional principle of majority rule had to be forced through by illegal means.<sup>13</sup> A Russian minister ominously observed: “Poland is constantly plunged into disorder; as long as she keeps her present constitution, she does not deserve to be considered among the European powers.”<sup>14</sup>

In regard to the dearth of coherence in the szlachta, we might cite as evidence the numerous factions that ignored national interests in favor of conspiring with foreign powers to prevent a strong state and to place sympathetic monarchs on the throne. These are recurrent themes in Poland's early modern history.<sup>15</sup> But accounting for widespread irresponsibility is more difficult than illustrating it. Perhaps comparison to the Dutch Republic will prove illuminating. Three forces may be identified that gave Dutch elites a coherence conducive to effective wartime leadership. First, the burghers of the northern provinces of Burgundy and the Low Countries that became the Dutch Republic were men whose livelihood and wealth were based on trade. A substantial amount

<sup>13</sup> See Daniel Stone, *Polish Politics and National Reform 1775–1788* (New York: Eastern European Quarterly, 1976).

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Davies, *God's Playground*, Volume 1, p. 511.

<sup>15</sup> Stone, *Polish Politics*, pp. 44–46; *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 5, pp. 562–64; *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 6, pp. 686–97. On foreign manipulation of internal politics, Stone states: “The *Liberum Veto*, which was supposed to check the absolutist designs of the Polish monarchy, was made to serve the purposes of the Russian Empire.”



of cooperation among shippers, bankers, insurers, and merchants led to a community of interest, concentrated in a few seaports, that to a certain extent complemented, but perhaps more importantly sharply conflicted with, similar communities in rival commercial centers. There was a political economy of centripetal interests distinguishing them from other areas' merchants, which, when embellished with certain types of historiography and sentimental semiotics, became nationalism, or at least a sound basis for it.

Second, the Dutch Revolt itself furthered nationalism and elite responsibility by pitting the community against an intrusive foreign power with administrative control over the Netherlands. Habsburg ministers threatened the economic, political, and religious bases of the community when they attempted to strengthen control over the Low Countries. Wars with Spain furthered the sense of community and forced the burghers to arrive at some measure of responsible government, or face becoming a subordinate tributary of the Spanish empire. Comparisons to the Polish elite reveal no parallel community of interest. The unity of the numerous clans served well to check Piast and Jagiellonian dynasts, but, with the latter family's demise and the boom in grain production, the clans were no longer a unitary warrior caste, carriers of prototypical nationalism. The szlachta became individual landlords who left the vagaries of transporting and marketing grain to foreign (coincidentally, Dutch) merchants, and so did not develop cohesive ties that might form the basis for a coherent elite. They were little more than gentry sacks of potatoes, whose main concern outside their manors became the protection of their liberties and incomes from the crown, and the surest method of ensuring that seemed to be the maintenance of a narrowly proscribed state. Nor was there the centripetal force of overt foreign government, at least not until the late eighteenth century, when it was too late. But by then, the patriotic revolution led by Kosciuszko was, as we shall see, easily overwhelmed by the modern armies of surrounding powers.

Third, the problem of the numbers of the gentry reasserts itself. The szlachta comprised a large number of landowners, sprawled across central Europe, without adequate means of communication. In the Netherlands, merchant elites were highly concentrated in the coastal provinces of Holland and Zeeland, with a powerful group of regents centered in Amsterdam, facilitating executive capacity. The large number of the Polish gentry contrasts with the cliquish Dutch regents, who, tied together by business communities and fear of Spanish authority, formed a competent executive to manage the country, even in the desperate hours of war. The szlachta, in contrast, allied with foreign powers to prevent political change. In their amateurish attempts to play the game of international intrigue, they succeeded only in becoming the dupes of calculating

foreign autocrats. The Polish gentry exchanged the privilege of national sovereignty for the right to make money.

Geographic-determinist explanations for Poland's dismemberment are vitiating by the examples of Prussia and Austria, which were hardly blessed by position in the state system, yet nonetheless survived by building modern states and armies. Poland entered the early modern period with a state—the term seems only barely appropriate—far weaker than that of other European territories, thereby making the prospects for military-bureaucratic mobilization, at the very best, unlikely. Nor was the Polish diet's assumption of effective rule any likelier. Unwieldy numbers, the *Liberum Veto*, and the absence of unity of purpose in the szlachta prevented the evolution of the diet into a coherent decision-making body. The problems of Polish constitutional government cannot be expressed more clearly or eloquently than here: "Few can now doubt that the 'golden freedom' of the Polish squires was chaos thinly gilded, or that their pride in a constitution which as they held drew the best from monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, sprang from failure to comprehend any of the three."<sup>16</sup>

#### MILITARY SUCCESS AND MILITARY STAGNATION

Szlachta control of the polity meant control of the military. The gentry consistently rejected military reform along the lines undertaken by Prussian and Russian heads of state. Poland entered the seventeenth and even the eighteenth century without a modern military structure. It had no large infantry formations, rational supply systems, or substantial numbers of cannon; its more modern, though less constitutional, neighbors did not allow it to enter the nineteenth century. Yet between the rise of the szlachta republic and the partitions in the late eighteenth century, Poland had a string of notable military successes. Indeed, even in the seventeenth century there were impressive victories over Russia and the Turks at the very gates of Vienna. It is to this paradox that we must now turn.

From the earliest struggles in the medieval period until the eighteenth century, the Polish military was based on the levy of gentry knights. To be sure, these hosts were augmented, as were Western feudal armies, by occasional mercenary units and a levy of peasant foot soldiers, but the knights were the mainstay, performing quite well in the Middle Ages, subjugating indigenous tribes and repulsing invaders. Such were their victories over Cossack and Tatar raiding parties, as well as the German

<sup>16</sup> *The Cambridge History of Poland*, Volume 2, p. xiii.



Order's drive to the east, that medieval Poland attained the reputation of a considerable regional military power. Victory over the Teutonic Knights at Tannenberg (1410) gave the seemingly invincible knights of the German Order their most stunning defeat since the days of Alexander Nevsky, and made the once-proud knights the humble vassals of the Polish crown.<sup>17</sup> But in the decades after Tannenberg, the feudal hosts fared poorly against the resurgent Order, and also against the Hussites. The latter's tactical innovations and increased use of disciplined infantry made as little impression on the Polish military as the victories of Flemish and English infantry had on French chivalry.<sup>18</sup> While Poland's neighbors modernized their forces, problems with the feudal levy increased: it was notoriously slow to gather; law prevented its deployment outside the country; it could not be tactically divided; and, in a display of medieval sensibility, it refused to fight at harvest time. Judging by a contemporary journal, campaigns were somewhat of a lark, filled with frivolity and hobnobbing between infrequent engagements.<sup>19</sup>

The szlachta obstinately opposed raising a modern infantry. When infantry began to make some inroads, it was not used in battle, and was disbanded at the earliest opportunity.<sup>20</sup> During wars with Sweden and the Ottoman Empire in the early seventeenth century, the infantry made up over half of the military, but the szlachta adamantly refused to maintain a standing army, despite danger throughout Eastern Europe.<sup>21</sup> Opposition stemmed from three main sources. First, the gentry saw its preeminence in the military as a basis for its cherished privileges and rights, so they were naturally reluctant to endanger that basis by restructuring the military in a manner that made commoners of such social, and possibly later political, importance. Opposition to modern infantry is, of course, a familiar story in European history, but the political strength of the szlachta was far greater than that of its counterparts. Thus, the weak Polish crown, despite clear external threats, was unable to pursue modernization over diet objections. Second, the gentry refused to pay the expenses of a standing army. Instead, the parsimonious nobles held fast to the principle, long since obsolete in the West, that the king must fi-

nance state and army from his personal demesne, a burden not even the latifundia of the Radziwills could assume.<sup>22</sup> Even during the disastrous Northern War (1655–1660), which came close to extinguishing national independence at an earlier date, the crown's triumph in obtaining an infantry conscription system was negated by the gentry's refusal to allocate sufficient money for equipment.<sup>23</sup> Finally, opposition to military reform came from the gentry's reluctance to share entrenched estate labor with the army, and the idea of arming serfs raised decidedly unsettling possibilities.<sup>24</sup>

Aside from these worries, two other factors help to account for Poland's retention of feudal levies as the basis for the army. First, a substantial external threat was presented, not by modern armies, but by Cossack and Tatar raiding parties, and the light cavalry of the Polish gentry was about as useful as centrally directed standing armies in irregular frontier warfare. It was effective in reconnaissance and pursuit along Poland's lengthy, ill-defined, and exposed frontiers to the southeast.<sup>25</sup> Second, in the seventeenth century, the Polish military was nonetheless able to win impressive victories over large modern armies, despite increasing obsolescence. It is not possible to recount each conflict in which Poland found itself during this century, but important reasons for these initially puzzling successes may be elucidated by focusing on three principal ones: the defeat of Russia in the early part of the century, the Northern War, and the legendary defeat of the Turks at century's close.

Poland won great victories over Russia, had a protégé temporarily installed as tsar, and expanded far to the east. But this was during a time

<sup>22</sup> *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 3, p. 397; *The Cambridge History of Poland*, Volume 1, pp. 318–19; Davies, *God's Playground*, Volume 1, p. 478.

<sup>23</sup> Wimmer, "l'Infanterie dans l'armée polonaise," pp. 89–92.

<sup>24</sup> Stanislaw Herbst, "l'Armée polonaise et l'art militaire au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 3 (1960): 33–48. While the fear of an armed, trained peasantry may indeed have motivated the gentry, the existence of the Kantonsystem in nearby Prussia ably belied the incompatibility of peasant infantry with servile labor. Furthermore, mercenary units were readily available.

<sup>25</sup> Jerzy Teodorczyk, "L'armée polonaise aux XV<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles," in Biegnanski, Stawecki, and Wojtasik, *Histoire Militaire de Pologne*, pp. 102–3; Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 37. These raiding parties, one of which, as we have seen, razed Berlin, were particularly bold in the period from 1630 to 1660, a period of rapid military modernization in Europe. See *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 4, p. 598. In the early seventeenth century, the Polish cavalry also fared well against small Swedish contingents, who were initially bewildered, as the English had been by their Celtic adversaries, by their foe's unusual, outdated army. See Michael Roberts, *The Early Vasas: A History of Sweden, 1523–1611* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 400–404, and *Gustavus Adolphus: A History of Sweden 1611–1632*, Volume 2: 1626–1632 (London: Longmans, Green, 1958), pp. 189–337.

<sup>17</sup> See Sven Ekdahl, *Die Schlacht bei Tannenberg 1410: Quellenkritische Untersuchungen*, Volume 1: *Einführung und Quellenlage* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1982); Michael Burleigh, *Prussian Society and the German Order: An Aristocratic Order in Crisis, c. 1410–1466* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 70–72.

<sup>18</sup> *The Cambridge History of Poland*, Volume 1, pp. 247–72.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 519; Leach, *Polish Baroque*. As noted earlier, the levies were also occasions for a destabilizing *rokosz*.

<sup>20</sup> Jan Wimmer, "l'Infanterie dans l'armée polonaise aux XV–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles," in Witold Bieganski, Piotr Stawecki, and Janusz Wojtasik, eds., *Histoire militaire de Pologne: Problèmes choisis* (Warsaw: Edition du Ministère de la Défense Nationale, 1970).

<sup>21</sup> Wimmer, "l'Infanterie dans l'armée polonaise," pp. 88–92.



of internal chaos in Russia, the so-called Time of Troubles or *Smuta*, during which it was wracked by civil wars, boyar treachery and intrigue, and jarring peasant rebellions. There was no coherence in the Muscovite state, only an operatic succession of usurpers and pretenders. Poland undertook this war with Russia with little fear of encountering strong military opposition, modern or feudal.<sup>26</sup> It would be quite another matter after the military reforms of Peter the Great.

In the 1650s, Poland warred with Russia, Sweden, and Brandenburg. Battles with the latter two foes were unmitigated disasters for Poland. The levies performed miserably, and many provinces, as well as Warsaw itself, capitulated to invaders. When sizeable annexations seemed inescapable, state-system dynamics came to Poland's aid. Fearing a disadvantageous shift of power to its Scandinavian nemesis, Austria prevailed upon the Romanovs to cease hostilities, thereby freeing Poland's eastern forces. Diplomacy triumphed where its army had failed when Poland ceded East Prussia to the Great Elector in exchange for his volte-face. Fortuitous but short-lived international dynamics, not military might, won this round in the struggle for sovereignty. But it is important to note that the respite granted by international dynamics did not stem from long-term diplomacy—the chaotic Polish state was incapable of that. Its reprieve came mainly from external actors, in Vienna and Berlin, who feared a more powerful predator in the region.

In the late seventeenth century, Poland engaged in wars against Austria and Prussia, and later allied with Austria against the Ottoman Empire. This, of course, was the period of Poland's greatest military hero, Jan Sobieski, who fought lengthy wars against large modern armies, including that of the Porte. But again, alliances and foreign subsidies, not internal military modernization, account for the successes of this period. It will not, it is hoped, tarnish the great king's military reputation to note that he commanded scarcely twenty-five thousand Polish soldiers, or that he received two hundred thousand livres a year from Louis XIV to wage war on his Prussian and Austrian enemies, or that his legendary relief of Vienna (1683) was undertaken by the same number of Polish troops augmented by thirty-one thousand imperial and mercenary troops, recruited, paid, and supplied by Austrian money.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 4, pp. 593–95; V. O. Kluchevsky, *A History of Russia*, Volume 3, C. J. Hogarth, trans. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1960), pp. 1–90. Meanwhile, Sweden began to carve out an empire on the Baltic, largely at Poland's expense, and helped Russia to expel Polish troops and collaborators. See *The Cambridge History of Poland*, Volume 1, pp. 475–87.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 547–48. Sobieski was unable to parlay his military successes into a stronger state or military reform. See *Ibid.*, pp. 555–56.

Foreign subsidies and alliances, not modern military structures, were the keys to Polish success on the battlefields of the seventeenth century. Subsidies and alliances served, it is true, to preserve Polish constitutionalism, but, by fostering the illusion that the levies could still more than hold their own against the modern armies of the region, they justified deferment of badly needed military reforms. Military prowess was a domestic illusion and an external facade: "Poland emerged from war nominally among the victors, in reality a ruined and a second-rate power."<sup>28</sup>

#### THINGS FALL APART

By the outset of the eighteenth century, the constellation of protective factors upon which Polish sovereignty depended had disappeared, and new ones did not emerge. The facade was falling away, revealing a weak state and an antediluvian army. Political turmoil in Russia settled with the accession of the Romanov dynasty (1613), and, though peasant rebellions continued to erupt periodically, the tsars and the gentry forged a strong repressive apparatus, and the Russian state became ever more powerful. Peter the Great's state and military reforms in the early eighteenth century made the Russian army among the best in Europe.<sup>29</sup> Poland's other neighbors also modernized. Brandenburg-Prussia's military developed from the Great Elector's small force into the vaunted armies of Frederick the Great. Austria, too, had modernized in the course of protracted wars with the Turks and Bourbons, especially after the Thirty Years' War.<sup>30</sup>

Surrounded by such might, Poland could not rely on foreign resource mobilization, as had the Swedes in most of their wars. Even an initial penetration of foreign soil would have resulted in a swift, crushing counteroffensive from one or more of the major powers in eastern Europe, the likes of which the weak German principalities or the distant and partially demobilized Catholic armies could not have delivered against the small Swedish force that availed itself of German resources to build a powerful army. Nor was sufficient revenue forthcoming from interna-

<sup>28</sup> *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 6, p. 715. In the decades following the defeat of the Armada in 1588, England too suffered from an exaggerated sense of military might that helped delay military modernization, but with a less unfortunate outcome. See Conrad Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics 1621–1629* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 70–84.

<sup>29</sup> J.L.H. Keep, *Soldiers of the Tsars: Army and Society in Russia 1462–1874* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 95–174.

<sup>30</sup> See Robert A. Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526–1918* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 125–33; and Eugen Heischmann, *Die Anfänge des stehenden Heeres in Österreich* (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1925), pp. 181–224.



tional trade to provide sufficient wealth to modernize without onerous domestic mobilization. Grain trade with the West was lucrative enough to build impressive manors, but it hardly brought in wealth rivaling that of the Amsterdam regents or the Venetian oligarchs.<sup>31</sup> Once-thriving Polish towns declined rapidly when the fall of Constantinople (1453) severed trade with the Levant, and when grain exited only a few Baltic ports, principally Danzig.<sup>32</sup> Even after winning suzerainty over East Prussia in the early fifteenth century, Poland failed to gain meaningful control over the Baltic ports, and in any case ceded the region to Brandenburg in 1660.<sup>33</sup> Nor could commercial wealth be fostered by means of state-directed activities as Colbert had done in France. This strategy would have required shifting considerable power and responsibility to the state, a move antithetical to szlachta interests, as they saw them.<sup>34</sup> Alliances provided the basis for the survival of the country in the seventeenth century, but became the basis for its demise in the eighteenth. Although state-system dynamics frequently bring the protection of a major power, this foreign help cannot always be relied upon, and, although to a certain extent alliances stem from the logic of the international order, they nonetheless must be made, continued, and remade when need be. But Poland had no coherent state to pursue a sustained diplomatic policy aimed at preventing an irresistible alliance of surrounding countries.

The Great Northern War (1700–1721) shattered Poland's illusions as well as its security. Following the Treaty of Warsaw, Poland came under Russian hegemony: its army could not exceed twenty-four thousand men; foreign armies could avail themselves of Polish resources; and, as though to ensure that there would be no military reform, Prussians were barred from state service.<sup>35</sup> The next half century was one of foreign manipulation of szlachta cliques, which prevented state and military reforms and maintained a weak neighbor.<sup>36</sup> Hegemonized and manipulated by foreign

<sup>31</sup> Owing to the greater profitability of transporting and distributing grain, much of the wealth generated by the Baltic grain trade went to the shippers and merchants, not the growers. It is perhaps ironic that these services were dominated by the Dutch.

<sup>32</sup> *The Cambridge Medieval History*, Volume 8, pp. 582–83.

<sup>33</sup> Perry Anderson asserts that the szlachta did not pursue maritime empire because of opportunities for easy expansion to the south and east, where land and servile labor abounded. See *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, pp. 288–89. Similarly, it has been argued that China failed to expand overseas because of the relative ease with which it could expand inwardly toward central Asia. See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System 1: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), p. 57.

<sup>34</sup> *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 6, p. 682.

<sup>35</sup> Davies, *God's Playground*, Volume 1, pp. 496–510; *The Cambridge History of Poland*, Volume 2, pp. 65–66; *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 6, pp. 776–77.

<sup>36</sup> Michael G. Müller, *Polen zwischen Preussen und Russland: Souveränitätskrise und Reformpolitik 1736–1752* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1983); Jerzy T. Lukowski, "Towards

powers, Poland was unable to mount effective reform. This preserved a measure of sovereignty, but only until the surrounding powers could agree on dividing the estate and arranging the death of the eastern European sick man. But perhaps Frederick the Great, his gift for metaphor heightened by proximity to the situation and appreciation for its potential, expressed it better: Poland, he observed was "an artichoke, ready to be consumed leaf by leaf."<sup>37</sup> The First Partition (1772) was made possible by a Hohenzollern-Romanov alliance based on Frederick's desire to secure his annexations from Austria in the Seven Years' War (1756–1763). Austrian acquiescence to the partition and accompanying change in its region's power order was won by allowing the Habsburgs a share of the spoils, a diplomatic formula repeated successfully in 1793 and 1795.

Encircled by neighboring powers, Poland could expect no help from distant powers. The French position, as constructed by the crown's minister, was resigned, but unalarmed:

The condition of Poland was abject and anarchic. Continued French involvement in Polish affairs could only mean immense expenditure with no results. Choiseul recommended that Poland be abandoned to her natural fate, that France not interfere. . . . He had no faith that Poland could be reformed and no fear of her dismemberment. . . . Even if Poland's neighbors jointly agreed to dismember her, France still had nothing to fear, because within a short time the despoilers would fall into disagreement among themselves and the balance of power in eastern Europe would be readjusted.<sup>38</sup>

Nor would Great Britain come to Poland's defense. Alluding to its distance from the reach of British military might, Edmund Burke said on the floor of Parliament, "Poland must be regarded as being situated on the moon."<sup>39</sup>

The Polish diet was unable to mount an effective response to the First Partition. Divisions, unwieldiness, and intrigues prevented an already weak, elected monarchy from embarking upon the regrettable but necessary path of military-bureaucratic absolutism. Even with its enemies partitioning its country, the diet could agree upon authorizing only a fifty-five-thousand-man army. It is lamentable, but predictable, that the

Partition: Polish Magnates and Russian Intervention in Poland during the Early Reign of Stanislaw August Poniatowski," *Historical Journal* 28 (1985): 557–74; Stone, *Polish Politics*, pp. 44–46; *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 5, pp. 562–64, Volume 6, pp. 686–97, Volume 8, pp. 365–95; Davies, *God's Playground*, Volume 1, pp. 347–48.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 515.

<sup>38</sup> Herbert H. Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 18. France gave diplomatic aid for a brief period, but withheld military and financial support prior to abandoning Poland to its "natural fate." See Kaplan, pp. 18–31.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Davies, *God's Playground*, Volume 1, p. 524.



feudal cavalry remained in the forefront of this force, whose task it was to engage the modern infantry, cavalry, and artillery of the great powers—a mismatch almost as great as one pitting cavalry against panzers.<sup>40</sup> Renewed efforts at governmental centralization had limited success but were ultimately thwarted by internal gentry opposition, and by Prussian and Russian pressure.<sup>41</sup> Increased opposition to foreign domination proved to be too little, too late. With most of Europe preoccupied with the events of the French Revolution, Prussia and Russia crushed opposition and divided the rest of Poland in 1793 and 1795.<sup>42</sup> Austria received its *douceurs*. The last vestiges of Polish sovereignty, and constitutionalism, vanished beneath the armies of absolutist powers.

In the interlude between the Second and Third Partitions, a valiant and desperate effort to mobilize the nation was undertaken by Thaddeus Kosciuszko. Inspired by the victories of the French *levée en masse*, this great patriot and student of modern warfare rapidly mobilized a peasant infantry, linked command and promotions to merit rather than birth, and introduced modern artillery and infantry tactics.<sup>43</sup> Slapdash to be sure, yet similar desperate measures in revolutionary France had fielded a highly nationalistic mass army that soundly defeated Austrian and Prussian armies, and formed the basis of Bonaparte's armies. But the successes of the French mass mobilization were not repeated in Poland, and for reasons that call for investigation.

First, though damaged in the early years of the Revolution, the French military, unlike that of Kosciuszko, nonetheless had a solid infrastructure upon which the *levée en masse* could be built. Thanks to the military priorities of French absolutism, supply systems, conscription networks, and modern artillery were already in existence. The largely aristocratic officer corps had been decimated by purges and emigration, but the

<sup>40</sup> Herbst, "l'Armée polonaise," p. 35. Recognizing their potential for helping to achieve Prussian foreign policy objectives, Frederick the Great had insisted on the retention of the Szym as well as the *Liberum Veto*. He munificently allowed, however, one exception to the veto right of each squire: there could be no veto of the ratification of the partition treaty. See Kaplan, *The First Partition*, pp. 170–75.

<sup>41</sup> Stone, *Polish Politics*, pp. 10–75.

<sup>42</sup> Davies, *God's Playground*, Volume 1, pp. 526–43.

<sup>43</sup> Zdzisław Sulek, "Tadeusz Kosciuszko—Chef et Réformateur Social," in Biegnaski, Stawiecki, and Wojtasik, *Histoire Militaire de Pologne*, pp. 114–32; Leonard Ratajczyk, "La défense territoriale pendant l'insurrection de Kosciuszko," in Biegnaski, Stawiecki, and Wojtasik, *Histoire Militaire de Pologne*, pp. 133–48; Herbst, "l'Armée polonaise," pp. 36–48; Wimmer, "l'Infanterie dans l'armée polonaise," pp. 93–94; *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 8, pp. 345–55. Inasmuch as Kosciuszko's military reforms were accompanied by governmental and social ones that freed the state as well as the peasantry from gentry abuse, one senses that success on the battlefield, unlikely as that was, might have ushered in an interesting new epoch in Polish history.

ranks were filled by capable middle-class officers—Bonaparte among them—who had been languishing in the less prestigious branches of the service, such as the engineers and artillery. Kosciuszko, on the other hand, faced the burden of building a mass army without the logistics, personnel, and equipment of a modern army. Second, again thanks in large measure to the preceding military-bureaucratic period, France entered the wars of coalition with a formidable economic system with which it could support its armies.<sup>44</sup> The contrast with the Polish nationalist army of 1794 is tragic. Kosciuszko's infantry could not be outfitted with muskets and integrated with existing regimental cadres. Most went into battle with nothing more than the scythes they carried with them from the fields; a romantic and inspiring image, worthy of a David or a Delacroix, but the peasants were mercilessly hewn by the volleys of Russian foot soldiers, and that is an image more worthy of a Goya. Third, numbers were against Poland. Kosciuszko's brave effort to mobilize the nation enabled him to field a force of a hundred and fifty thousand. A sizeable increase over the feudal host, but still woefully inadequate against the forces at the disposal of its enemies. The tsar could field four hundred thousand troops, Austria another three hundred thousand, and Prussia two hundred thousand.<sup>45</sup>

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Kosciuszko's exploits were an heroic last stand that could not make up for a century and a half of neglecting military reform. Poland entered the post-Westphalian world with a military structure ably suited for frontier skirmishes, but hopelessly incapable of ensuring territorial sovereignty in a time of continuous military growth. Though it was hardly favored by natural barriers, Poland's demise must be attributed to failure to modernize, as did surrounding powers. One might speculate that, had it done so, Russia, Prussia, or Austria might have found Poland a desirable alliance partner against the others, possibly precluding the partitioning alliance. As it was, Poland was only a weak and tempting target for surrounding states, a source of regional instability and tension that the major powers only too willingly removed.

Poland did not modernize army and state, and blame for this can be placed at the dragging feet of the Polish gentry, whose intransigence delivered the nation into foreign domination from which it has never recovered.

<sup>44</sup> Though availing himself of France's considerable economic output for equipping the army, Napoleon, it will be remembered, preferred to obtain his armies' food through mobile plunder.

<sup>45</sup> For the troop strengths of Poland's enemies at the time of Kosciuszko, see Ratajczyk, "La défense territoriale," p. 136.



ered for more than a couple of decades. Only now, after the horrific defeat of German and Austrian military power, and the apparent dissolution of Russian might, is Poland regaining control of its national destiny—happily, in an increasingly peaceful European order. The gentry's guilt is the verdict reached in a considerable portion of the historiographical literature, much of it seething with only thinly veiled contempt for them. It is difficult to survey Poland's history without concluding that the szlachta was perhaps the most irresponsible elite in all European history.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

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### England

THE CONSTITUTIONAL NATURE of English government, as is well known, dates back at least to the signing of Magna Carta, but wars left their mark, and any notion of its unilinear development into liberal democracy surely needs closer examination. Neither the Tudor nor the Stuart period was one of sustained, protracted war against a modern army. Despite conflicts with the Stuarts, as well as a moderately coercive Parliament during the Civil War period, constitutionalism carried through into the eighteenth century largely unscathed. The most damaging attacks on the constitution came not from the Houses of Tudor or Stuart, but from the House of Commons. Another period of history, starting in the late seventeenth century, will be examined. With the rise of French expansionism, England could no longer stay aloof from continental wars. Beginning its role as balancer of power, it increased the size of its armies, though even here not to the extent of France or Prussia. In the wars against Louis XIV, England found methods of exerting military power without mobilizing constitutionally debilitating amounts of its own resources.

#### MEDIEVAL CONSTITUTIONALISM

The Norman Conquest made England a more centralized state than any other in Europe. William and his successors stood at the head of a taxation and administrative system exceeding anything in Western Europe. The Domesday Book, judges, and reeves afforded the monarch more control over his domain than that wielded by early Capetians or Hohenstauffens. But a highly centralized state in the eleventh century did not contain an inherent mechanism for continuing its lead in centralization, nor did it undermine or preclude the cooperation between center and locality that was at the heart of constitutional government. Local agents of the crown were never tightly tied to an administrative apparatus by means of training, promotion, or salary. They were unpaid amateurs, at least as closely linked to local notables and MPs as to the king. This linkage became increasingly close, and provided a serious obstacle to Stuart and Cromwellian centralizing efforts, well intended or not: "[Q]ualified lawyers, the members of the House of Commons, and the J.P.s in Eliza-