

Frederick the Great and Imperial Politics, 1740-56

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Abstract

Frederick II's well-publicised contempt for the imperial constitution has led most historians to conclude that the Empire mattered little to Prussia after 1740 until his apparent, belated conversion to the cause of German unity in 1785 when he sponsored the *Fürstenbund*. This reappraises Prussian policy to demonstrate that Frederick quickly appreciated the imperial constitution as a means of enhancing Prussian security and frustrating Habsburg policy. However, it proved far more difficult to manipulate imperial politics than he expected, not least because Prussian interests conflicted with the growing desire for constitutional reform.

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The Holy Roman Empire does not appear at first to have mattered much to Frederick II 'the Great'. He knew little about it and cared even less, if we believe what he wrote on the subject. The imperial constitution was 'anachronistic and bizarre', while the German princes 'ruin themselves by excessive expenses out of inebriation with vain grandeur' selling themselves to the highest bidder to fund lives of indigent luxury.¹ Relations with the Empire were delegated to the junior department in the Prussian foreign ministry that still conducted its affairs in German, whereas all other external relations were reserved directly for the king who corresponded in French, the language of enlightened rationality and European royalty.² The future, it seemed, belonged to Prussia, rising inexorably as an independent great power, whereas the moribund, gothic Empire scarcely mattered at all.

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Generations of historians were happy to take the king at his word, finding in his writings prejudices they themselves shared. Though he did not share their goals of German nationalism, Frederick nonetheless carefully crafted a specific image of himself and Prussia for posterity. Above all, he sought to distance the Hohenzollerns from the mass of the other German dynasties from whose ranks

¹Abbreviations:

-GStA PK, I HA Rep = Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin-Dahlem, I. Hauptabteilung, Repertorium

-HSAS = Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart

-HHStA = Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv Wien

-LBS = Landesbibliothek Stuttgart

Quotations from the 1752 Political Testament, in: O. Bardong (ed.): *Friedrich der Große*, Darmstadt 1982, 227, and the 1739 The refutation of Machiavelli's Prince or Anti-Machiavel, in: P. Sonnino (ed.): *The refutation of Machiavelli's Prince or Anti-Machiavel*, Athens / Ohio 1981, 77-78. Prussia's relations with the Empire await a comprehensive treatment. Brief surveys are offered by T. Schieder: *Frederick the Great*, Harlow 2000, 169-180; V. Press: *Friedrich der Große als Reichspolitiker*, in: H. Duchhardt (ed.): *Friedrich der Große, Franken und das Reich*, Wien 1986, 25-56. For ease of reference, the Hohenzollern monarchy will be referred to as Prussia throughout, even though Prussia itself lay outside the Empire.

² U. Müller-Weil: *Absolutismus und Aussenpolitik in Preußen. Ein Beitrag zur Strukturgeschichte des preussischen Absolutismus*, Stuttgart 1992, 83-89, 163-172, 181-185; H.M. Scott: *Prussia's royal foreign minister: Frederick the Great and the administration of Prussian diplomacy*, in: R. Oresko et al. (eds.): *Royal and republican sovereignty in early modern Europe*, Cambridge 1997, 500-526.

they had only recently emerged. Few would now accept his verdict on the Empire. The imperial constitution was indeed under considerable strain, but some institutions underwent periodic revivals and most of the Empire's inhabitants wanted it to survive.³ Moreover, a careful reading of Frederick's writings reveals that he saw the Empire's weakness as a danger, not an opportunity. The apparent fragility of the imperial constitution could no longer prevent Austria or other powers from expanding their influence at the expense of the smaller imperial Estates (*Reichsstände*). Above all, he feared that the Habsburgs would redistribute territory to their advantage and exploit their imperial prerogatives to coerce the princes into supporting their policies.⁴

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Despite considerable speculation, Frederick had no intention of becoming emperor himself.⁵ Instead, he adopted the traditional role of champion of 'German liberty', a web of corporate rights enshrined in imperial law that safeguarded the autonomy and status of the imperial Estates.⁶ The slogan of 'German liberty' had been used in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century to legitimise Protestant resistance to Catholic Habsburg 'tyranny'. It was also promoted by France and Sweden as a device to contain Austria and was incorporated into the Peace of Westphalia that both powers guaranteed since 1648. Frederick drew on this tradition in order to assume a similar role as a distinct European monarch who possessed formal powers to intervene in imperial politics when necessary. He had no intention of detaching Prussia from the Empire, but instead wanted to enhance its privileged position within the imperial constitution. Prussia was to retain its powers to influence imperial politics whilst denying the emperor the right to intervene in its internal affairs. Moreover, its status was to be enhanced to distance it from the other electors and princes and place it on par with the sovereign European great powers. These goals were related to Frederick's pragmatic sense of the balance of power. He believed the internal equilibrium within the Empire was a necessary part of a wider European balance. The Empire must remain a passive, neutral buffer between the major powers. Above all, it was necessary to prevent Austria, but also France from acquiring too much influence amongst the German princes.⁷ He had no desire to partition the Empire since this would not resolve the underlying problem

³ W. Burgdorf: Reichskonstitution und Nation. Verfassungsreformprojekte für das Heilige Römische Reich deutscher Nation im politischen Schrifttum von 1648 bis 1806, Mainz 1998; K. Härter: Reichstag und Revolution 1789-1806, Göttingen 1992; G. Walter: Der Zusammenbruch des Heiligen Römischen Reiches deutscher Nation und die Problematik seiner Restauration in den Jahren 1814/15, Heidelberg 1980. Frederick's image in subsequent German history is explored thoroughly by P.M. Hahn: Friedrich der Große und die deutsche Nation. Geschichte als politisches Argument, Stuttgart 2007.

⁴ See Frederick's discussion of Habsburg history in his *Histoire de mon temps*, in: G.B. Volz (ed.): Die Werke Friedrichs des Großen, 10 vols., Berlin 1912-14, reprint Braunschweig 2006, II, especially 37-40, 157-160, as well as his fear of Joseph II in *ibid.*, V, 91-92, VII, 217-221. Further discussion of Frederick's writings in P.H. Wilson: Prussia's relations with the Holy Roman Empire, 1740-1786, in: *Historical Journal* 51 (2008), 337-371.

⁵ H. Duchhardt: Protestantisches Kaisertum und Altes Reich. Die Diskussion über die Konfession des Kaisers in Politik, Publizistik und Staatsrecht, Wiesbaden 1977, 284-295.

⁶ G. Schmidt: Die "deutsche Freiheit" und der Westfälische Friede, in: R.G. Asch et al. (eds.): *Frieden und Krieg in der Frühen Neuzeit*, München 2001, 323-347.

⁷ These views were expressed most clearly in his comments on the political situation on the eve of the Seven Years War in 1756: Volz: *Werke* (FN 4), III, 161-164.

of Prussia's security and he was prepared to forgo further territorial gains after 1745 if these risked prompting Austria to demand equivalents.

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These calculations left Frederick with little flexibility in his dealings with the Empire. Prussia's security depended on preserving the existing structure, placing the king in the role of a conservative opposition blocking all change. This was a difficult part to play. He did not want to become enmeshed in the framework he was trying to sustain, but it was hard to insist on constitutional propriety if Prussia flouted imperial law. He had little to offer potential allies among the imperial Estates, because his autarkic attitude to finance meant he was unwilling to pay subsidies, while only the emperor could grant the new titles and privileges that the more ambitious princes wanted. The lesser princes sought imperial reform, especially after 1763, whereas he favoured immobility.

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The following examines how Frederick's imperial policy evolved until the outbreak of the Seven Years War. What little has been written on Prussian imperial politics concentrates on the later period and especially on the *Fürstenbund*, or League of Princes formed by Frederick at the end of his reign. It is instructive, however, to examine the earlier period, because this was when Frederician imperial politics took shape. While he continued to profess contempt for the imperial constitution, he soon appreciated its value for Prussia. He never mastered the intricacies of imperial law and left the details to his ministers. Despite some initial mistakes, however, he became adept at exploiting the opportunities it offered to block Habsburg policies and prevent them mobilising German resources against him. He used the full range of Prussia's formal rights in institutions like the Reichstag, imperial circles (*Kreise*) and the Reichskammergericht.⁸ However, he relied primarily on informal ties to the princes and their servants that he carefully cultivated through his extensive correspondence, bribery and adept use of dynastic marriages.

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This mix of methods emerged as Frederick struggled to maintain the advantages he had seized by opening the War of the Austrian Succession ahead of his rivals by invading Silesia in December 1740. The decision to exploit the death of Emperor Charles VI to challenge the Habsburgs defined Frederick's entire reign, obliging him to oppose them both internationally and within the Empire.⁹

⁸ Thanks to its rights in three of the ten *Kreise*, Prussia could propose as many candidates as the emperor to fill vacancies in the Reichskammergericht, see S. Jähns: Brandenburg-Preußen im System der Reichskammergerichts-Präsentationen 1648-1806, in: H. Weber (ed.): Politische Ordnung und soziale Kräfte im alten Reich, Wiesbaden 1980, 169-202. For the *Fürstenbund*, see M. Umbach: The politics of sentimentality and the German *Fürstenbund*, 1779-1785, in: Historical Journal 41 (1998), 679-704; A. Kohler: Das Reich im Spannungsfeld des preußisch-österreichischen Gegensatzes. Die *Fürstenbund*bestrebungen 1783-1785, in: F. Engel-Janosi et al. (eds.): Fürst, Bürger, Mensch, München 1975, 71-96; D. Stievermann: Der *Fürstenbund* von 1785 und das Reich, in: V. Press (ed.): Alternativen zur Reichsverfassung in der Frühen Neuzeit?, München 1995, 209-226.

⁹ G.B. Volz: Das Rheinsberger Protokoll vom 29. Oktober 1740, in: Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und

Frederick's primary goal in the early 1740s was to assert Prussia's status as a true European monarchy by conquering and then defending Silesia. He quickly perceived this could not be achieved without also becoming involved in imperial politics, because he needed to prevent Austria turning its full strength against him. He also needed to safeguard his scattered western provinces in Westphalia that contained roughly one third of his subjects who, per capita, produced more tax than those in Silesia.

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Involvement in the Empire took three forms. Prussia's military strength was to be raised by persuading the German princes to provide additional recruits. Prussia's status would be enhanced by extracting concessions from Charles Albert of Bavaria in return for Frederick's support in the imperial election of 1741-42. Prussia's security would be safeguarded by alliances with the princes to neutralise the Empire and deny support to Austria.

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Frederick added over 23,000 men to his army in the six months between his accession and the invasion of Silesia, increasing the establishment by over 30 per cent. Another 35,000 were added by 1746, while many more had to be recruited in the meantime to sustain these numbers.¹⁰ As the men had to be raised quickly, it was an advantage if Prussia could take trained soldiers directly from other armies. Frederick also wanted to spare his own subjects who were already subject to conscription since 1733. He was reluctant to recruit in newly-conquered Silesia where conscription was only enacted once the war was over. This left Prussia more dependent on foreign recruits than at any other time in the eighteenth century.¹¹ Prior to 1714 Prussia had drawn men and money from other German territories in return for assuming their responsibilities to field men for the imperial army. This was no longer possible, because Charles VI had encouraged most of the minor territories to renounce these agreements after 1715. No further opportunities presented themselves prior to 1793, because the only imperial mobilisation after 1735 was that of 1757-62 against Prussia in the Seven Years War. This increased the significance of Prussia's Westphalian territories, because these enclaves enabled officers to recruit men in the relatively densely populated north-west German minor territories. Prussia also relied on recruiting posts in the imperial cities and in friendly lands elsewhere, such as those of its Franconian relations in Ansbach and Bayreuth. Prussian methods made its recruitment notorious

Preußischen Geschichte 29 (1916), 67-93; J. Kunisch: Friedrich der Große als Feldherr, in: ders.: Fürst - Gesellschaft - Krieg. Studien zur bellizistischen Disposition des absoluten Fürstenstaates, Köln 1992, 83-106.

¹⁰ Prussia lost over 22,000 soldiers in the five largest battles alone 1741-45. For the additional regiments, see C. Jany: Geschichte der preußischen Armee vom 15. Jahrhundert bis 1914, 4 vols., Berlin 1928/29, reprint Osnabrück 1967, II, 3-12, 49-56, 76-88.

¹¹ Jany: Armee (FN 10), II, 78-79, 236, 238; M. Winter: Untertanengeist durch Militärflicht? Das preußische Kantonsystem in brandenburgischen Städten im 18. Jahrhundert, Bielefeld 2005. While a further 60,000 had been added to the establishment by 1786, Prussia's population grew in the meantime from 3.5 (1745) to 5.5 million, lightening the burden on its own subjects.

throughout the Empire and it met growing resistance in the 1730s.¹²

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However, Frederick's accession coincided with widespread disillusionment with the Habsburgs. Austria had relied heavily on the princes during its unsuccessful wars against France (1733-35) and the Turks (1737-39), receiving over 44,000 recruits and auxiliaries in the latter conflict alone.¹³ Charles VI failed to pay or deliver the promised political rewards. Many territories were left with inflated armies they could not afford, especially as Austria discharged its auxiliaries with large pay arrears in 1739. Prior to then, Prussia had rarely taken over soldiers directly from other armies. The famous 'porcelain dragoons' acquired from Saxony in return for a dinner service in 1717 were a rare exception.¹⁴ However, several rulers approached Prussia in 1740 to transfer the soldiers recently returned by Austria. Frederick rapidly expanded these negotiations, not merely because he needed the men, but also to tie the princes to Prussia and prevent them backing the Habsburgs instead.

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The largest contingent came from Württemberg that provided over 5,400 men 1741-44, while Wolfenbüttel sent 1,200 and another 500 came from Eisenach. Schwarzburg transferred one company, Gotha and Ansbach sent recruits. Negotiations with Hessen-Darmstadt, Nassau-Usingen and Sachsen-Meiningen for additional units fell through in 1742, but Holstein-Gottorp transferred 260 soldiers in 1740-41, followed by another 749 in 1743.¹⁵ By that stage the princes were becoming less forthcoming and a major recruiting drive in south-west Germany met strong resistance in December 1744, forcing Frederick to make good the gap in his ranks by pressing 4,700 Austrian prisoners of war.¹⁶

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While they met an immediate need, the troop transfers also brought longer term benefits for Frederick by binding German princely dynasties to Prussian service. The prevailing 'company economy' gave colonels a financial stake in their units, entailing responsibilities to advance funds for necessary expenditure, subject to eventual reimbursement by the state. The system left room for personal profit,

¹² P.H. Wilson: The politics of military recruitment in eighteenth-century Germany, in: *English Historical Review* 117 (2002), 536-568; B. Sicken: Die preußische Werbung in Franken, in: H. Duchhardt (ed.): *Friedrich der Große*, 121-156; R. Gugger: *Preußische Werbungen in der Eidgenossenschaft im 18. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1995.

¹³ HHStA, Kriegsakten, Fasz.288 (neu), esp. specification dated 4 Nov.1739. See also P.H. Wilson: *German Armies: War and German politics 1648-1806*, London 1998, 238.

¹⁴ The only other troops incorporated into the army under Frederick William I were some Swedish prisoners of war in 1715-16 and the former Anhalt-Dessau contingent to the imperial army in 1736.

¹⁵ HSAS, A202 Bü.1208, 2113-2114, 2254; R. Wolf (ed.): *Zeitungen aus dem Jahre 1740*, Berlin 1912, 43, 96, 103; Jany: *Armee* (FN 10), II, 6-7, 25, 53-54, 79-81. For Prusso-Württemberg military connections see also D. Hohrath: "Verwandte - Feinde - Vorbilder": Aspekte der militärischen Beziehungsgeschichte Preußens und Württembergs im 18. Jahrhundert, in: J. Luh et al. (eds.): *Preussen, Deutschland und Europa 1701-2001*, Groningen 2003, 385-398; A. Pfister: *Drei Schwaben in fremden Kriegsdiensten*, in: *Württembergische Neujahrsblätter* 12 (1895), 1-56.

¹⁶ Jany: *Armee* (FN 10), II, 87 n.15, 106, 115-116, 237.

but also patronage, since colonels could recommend officers for appointment or promotion. Above all, regimental command provided an appropriate lifestyle for young aristocrats and princes with little prospect of inheriting the family lands.¹⁷ In return, Frederick expected his colonels to use their influence to find recruits. For example, infantry regiment no.3 was commanded by princes from Anhalt from 1679 until 1784 (with only a single break 1758-59). It was stationed in Halle near their principality. Though it had its own canton around Magdeburg where it could conscript Hohenzollern subjects, it had a far higher proportion of foreign-born officers than average, with the majority of the outsiders coming from Anhalt and other minor Thuringian territories where they were expected to bring additional recruits.¹⁸

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Serving officers were bound by personal oaths of loyalty to the king who acquired influence over their choice of wife and other aspects of their lives. For example, Frederick used the opportunity of the transfer of the Wolfenbüttel regiment in September 1740 to strengthen ties to the ducal family, the Hohenzollerns' principal dynastic partners since 1733. Ten Wolfenbüttel princes subsequently served as regimental commanders during his reign, many rising to the highest ranks.¹⁹

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Some princes were unwilling to enter into such close relations with Prussia. On the death of Wilhelm Heinrich of Sachsen-Eisenach in 1741, his successor, Ernst August of Weimar, refused to replace him as colonel of the former Eisenach infantry regiment that had transferred to Prussia the previous year, pointing out that 'the equivalent of 14 regiments have been taken from the Eisenach and Jena lands over the past 16 years'. He began harbouring deserters, forcing Frederick to move the regiment from Magdeburg to more distant quarters in Frankfurt/Oder.²⁰

<14>

Altogether 46 imperial princes, counts and barons from 20 families held regimental command in the Prussian army between 1740 and 1786, while others held general's rank and many more served in more junior positions. German territorial nobility (Landadel) formed the majority of the 'foreigners' who together constituted around one-third of all officers. Germans from beyond the Hohenzollern lands

¹⁷ F. Redlich: *The German military enterpriser and his workforce*, 2 vols., Wiesbaden 1964/65, II.

¹⁸ W. Hanne (ed.): *Rangirrolle, Listen und Extracte...von Saldern Infanterie Regiment Anno 1771*, Osnabrück 1986. For princes mentioned here see K. v. Priesdorff: *Soldatisches Führertum*, 10 vols., Hamburg 1936-1941; *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, 56 vols., Leipzig / München 1875-1912.

¹⁹ Hohenzollern-Wolfenbüttel relations had been cemented by the double marriage in 1733 between Frederick and Elisabeth Christine (1715-97) and her brother, the future Duke Karl I (1713-80), and Frederick's sister, Philippine Charlotte (1716-1801). Frederick's brother, August Wilhelm (1722-58), was betrothed in September 1740 to Karl's other sister, Louise Amalia (1722-80). Their son, the future Frederick William II, took another Wolfenbüttel princess as his first wife in 1765. For Frederick's marriage, see T. Biskup: *The hidden queen: Elisabeth Christine of Prussia and Hohenzollern queenship*, in: C.C. Orr (ed.): *Queenship in Europe, 1660-1815: The role of the consort*, Cambridge 2004, 300-321.

²⁰ Jany: *Armee* (FN 10), II, 6-7; C. v. Geispitzheim: *Historische Nachrichten von dem Koenigl. Preussisch. Hochloeblichen Füsillier-Regiment des Herrn General-Major von Erlach, 1778*, reprint Osnabrück 1971.

also predominated among the foreigners who formed around half of the Prussian rank and file in peacetime. However, fewer of these soldiers were provided voluntarily by friendly princes after the mid-1750s. Whereas princes comprised 9 per cent of Prussia's generals in the first half of Frederick's reign, they only represented 5 per cent after 1763.²¹ Their numbers were dwarfed by those still entering Austrian service. At least 14 Protestant princely dynasties were still represented amongst the Habsburg general staff after 1740, in addition to numerous Catholic families.²² Moreover, unlike the Habsburgs, Frederick had few court or government posts to offer, and these overwhelmingly went to indigenous nobles or those from the German territorial nobility.

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While Frederick's diplomacy with the lesser princes was directed at securing troops, his negotiations with Bavaria centred on improving Prussian status. These discussions are rarely given much prominence in accounts of this period that focus on Frederick's alliance with France and efforts to secure international recognition for his possession of Silesia.²³ Frederick himself professed little interest in them subsequently. He was impatient with ceremonial, claiming his father had already ignored it, while he had no time for diplomatic protocol. He heaped scorn on his grandfather for wasting time and resources on acquiring the royal title in 1700, dismissing him as a 'theatre king'.²⁴ The Prussian title was not recognised by the western and northern European powers until 1713. Poland waited until 1764 and the papacy until 1787, while the Teutonic Order continued to object because it still claimed Prussia.²⁵ Convinced of his own royalty, Frederick was determined to be accepted as a full king 'of' not 'in' Prussia as specified in the original grant by Leopold I. The Bourbons rejected his requests for parity of status in 1741, 1744, 1751 and 1753, but Charles VII was unable to resist the pressure. In return for recognising Bavarian claims to Austrian territory and Frederick's vote in the imperial elections, Charles made extensive promises on 4 November 1741.²⁶

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Charles agreed to enfeoff Frederick with Lower Silesia and Glatz once he had become emperor. This promise was later extended to include Upper Silesia as well once it had been conquered and was

²¹ E. Stockinger: *Vorbildung, Herkunft und Werdegang militärischer Führer in Deutschland von 1730-1813*, in: *Wehrkunde* 24 (1975), 592-597; W.R. Fann: *Foreigners in the Prussian army 1713-1756*, in: *Central European History* 23 (1990), 76-85.

²² Calculated from the list prepared by Dr. Antonio Schmidt-Brentano for the on-going project of the Austrian State Archives to collect biographies of all Habsburg generals 1618-1815. My thanks to Dr. Michael Hochedlinger for supplying a copy of this list.

²³ Most recent overview J. Kunisch: *Friedrich der Große. Der König und seine Zeit*, München 2004, 159-224. See also F. Wagner: *Kaiser Karl VII. und die großen Mächte 1740-1745*, Stuttgart 1938.

²⁴ The term was allegedly coined by Frederick I's wife: *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la maison de Brandebourg*, in: *Volz: Werke (FN 4)*, I, 98-100, 104-105. It reappears in the 1752 *Political Testament* where Frederick writes that the purpose of princely education was to raise 'a king of Prussia, not a theatre king': *Bardong* (ed.): *Friedrich der Große*, 261. See also *ibid.*, 206.

²⁵ J.J. Moser: *Neues Teutsches Staatsrecht*, 20 vols., Frankfurt a. M. 1766-1775, XX, 448.

²⁶ P.C. Hartmann: *Karl Albrecht, Karl VII. Glücklicher Kurfürst, unglücklicher Kaiser*, Regensburg 1985, 194, 254; R. Koser: *Geschichte Friedrichs des Großen*, 4 vols., Stuttgart 1921-1925, I, 364-365.

intended to make it harder for Austria to recover the provinces. Charles informed the elector of Mainz, as imperial archchancellor, that he had granted Frederick the title of sovereign duke of Silesia in December 1743, thus removing it from imperial jurisdiction entirely. Frederick ensured this was written into the Peace of Dresden in 1745 and refused to accept documents from Mainz that did not include the new title.²⁷ Charles also granted the title of 'majesty' exclusively to Frederick. The electors had sought this collectively in their negotiations with each prospective emperor during the eighteenth century to express parity with European monarchs and reassert pre-eminence over the imperial princes that had been diminished with the Reichstag's permanence after 1663. Despite having their own separate royal titles, the Saxon and Hanoverian electors pressed Francis Stephen for the same dignity during his election in 1745. Frederick backed their fruitless negotiations till 1748 in the hope of forcing Austria to accept his own majesty title.

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As part of his wider objective of achieving parity with the Habsburgs, Frederick obliged Charles VII to concede the same ceremonial distinctions they enjoyed as archdukes of Austria. Prussian monarchs could now receive their investiture of their lands as imperial fiefs standing up, rather than kneeling in submission. The exemption from the investiture fees (*Laudemien*) they already enjoyed as electors of Brandenburg was extended to all their possessions, matching the privileged position enjoyed by the Habsburgs since 1648. The Habsburgs tried to reverse this once they recovered the imperial title in 1745, insisting, for example, the electors still send a humble apology if they failed to appear at their investiture in person. The intention was to reassert the traditional imperial hierarchy and prevent the princes demanding the same privileges as the electors. The issue resurfaced after Joseph II's accession in 1765. He was prepared to concede most of the electors' demands, but Frederick still objected to any special privileges for Austria, and refused to discuss the issue at their personal meeting at Neisse in 1769. Eventually, Joseph instructed the Reichshofrat to drop its insistence on the traditional distinctions in 1788. Nevertheless, Frederick accepted that Prussia remained part of the Empire, paying 10,000 florins as *Laudemien* to obtain enfeoffment with East Frisia in 1745. He also sent his formal letter acknowledging submission to Joseph as emperor in 1766, though he broke protocol by refusing to sign it personally.²⁸

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Meanwhile, Charles VII had instructed the Reichshofrat to accept Prussian noble titles as valid throughout the Empire. The right to ennoble was not only a significant element of sovereign monarchy, but also a useful device to attract talent to Prussia and reward loyalty. Frederick already used his powers to ennoble to win support in Silesia. Counts Schönau and Hatzfeldt were raised to the status of Prussian princes in 1741, while a further twelve new nobles were created and six leading Silesians

²⁷ Moser: Neues Teutsches Staatsrecht (FN 25), XX, 44-45, 447-449.

²⁸ Ibid.: IX 1-429; J.F. Noel: Zur Geschichte der Reichsbelehungen im 18. Jahrhundert, in: Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs 21 (1968), 106-122; A. Schmid: Max III. Joseph und die europäischen Mächte. Die Außenpolitik des Kurfürstentums Bayern 1745-1765, München 1987, 285-288.

decorated with the Order of the Black Eagle, founded originally by Frederick I to mark the new Prussian royal title.²⁹

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Finally, Charles was obliged to extend Prussia's already privileged position within imperial jurisdiction. Brandenburg had already obtained full exemption from the jurisdiction of the imperial courts through the award of an unlimited *privilegium de non appellando* in 1586. A more limited version was granted in 1702 to cover lands acquired subsequently, but Hohenzollern subjects could still appeal to the courts, as Frederick William discovered during his dispute with the Magdeburg knights in 1717. Frederick William responded by bribing the judges and other chicanery when Charles VI refused to grant Prussia the same complete exemption for all its provinces as enjoyed by the Habsburgs. Even Charles VII realised exemption would reduce imperial authority and delayed honouring his promise. Further Prussian victories obliged Emperor Francis to accept it, though haggling over the appropriate fee delayed implementation until 1750 when full exemption was extended to all Hohenzollern possessions within the Empire. This effectively prevented imperial institutions interfering in Prussia's internal affairs, though it was discovered in 1784 that a case from a Halberstadt village had reached the Reichskammergericht.³⁰ Frederick closed informal channels as well, banning the practice of consulting the law faculties of universities in neighbouring territories (*Aktenversendung*) in 1746 as part of his wider reforms of Prussian justice.³¹

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Other ties to the Empire were also loosened in 1750. Prussia began circumventing imperial currency regulations, leading to full-scale coinage debasement after 1755. Meanwhile, an order from 24 June 1750 removed the traditional inclusion of 'Kaiser und Reich' in the weekly prayers of Prussian subjects, whereas they remained in those of the inhabitants of the imperial cities until after Francis II's abdication in 1806.³² Nonetheless, Prussia remained within the Empire and subject to its laws in its dealings with other imperial Estates, and Frederick was quick to back his own subjects in the imperial courts if they became embroiled in disputes with those in other territories.

²⁹ T. Klein: Die Erhebungen in den weltlichen Reichsfürstenstand 1550-1806, in: Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte 122 (1986), 137-192, at: 189-192.

³⁰ Moser: Neues Teutsches Staatsrecht (FN 25), VIII part 1, 200-224; P. Rauscher: Recht und Politik. Reichsjustiz und oberstrichterliches Amt des Kaisers im Spannungsfeld des preußisch-österreichischen Dualismus (1740-1785), in: Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs 46 (1998), 269-309, at: 279-283, 307; K. Perels: Die allgemeinen Appellationsprivilegien für Brandenburg-Preußen, in: K. Zeumer (ed.): Quellen und Studien zur Verfassungsgeschichte des Deutschen Reiches in Mittelalter und Neuzeit vol.3, Weimar 1910, 1-153.

³¹ H. Weill: Frederick the Great and Samuel von Cocceji. A study in the reform of the Prussian judicial administration 1740-1755, Madison 1961, 50-54; W. Hubatsch: Frederick the Great. Absolutism and administration, London 1975, 211-220.

³² H. Neuhaus: Das Ende des Alten Reiches, in: H. Altricher/H. Neuhaus (eds.): Das Ende von Großreichen, Erlangen 1996, 185-209, at: 191.

<21>

Frederick also learned to appreciate the possibilities offered by the imperial constitution as he searched for security during the turbulent early 1740s. His initial object was to prevent Austria drawing support from its traditional clientele within the Empire. Aided by Mainz, Austria appealed to the smaller western and southern territories in 1741 for support under the terms of the permanent association, or alliance agreed between the Kreise in 1714.³³ However, it was unclear whether this alliance operated against internal, as well as external enemies, or if it applied during an imperial interregnum. Prussia and Bavaria manipulated this ambiguity to persuade the Kreise to adopt neutrality on an individual basis instead. For example, Prussia brokered the treaty of Ulm on 9 September 1741 whereby Swabian Kreis declared itself neutral, yet still permitted French reinforcements to reach Bavaria. The Swabian Kreis later signed a cartel with Prussia agreeing to exchange deserters that gave Frederick an excuse to send recruiting officers there in 1742.³⁴

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Next, Frederick moved to weaken the office of emperor should the Habsburgs recover it in the impending election. He broke ranks with his fellow electors to back long-standing demands from the princes to be included in the negotiations over the future emperor's constitutional obligations (the *Wahlkapitulation*), since inclusion of their issues would significantly undermine imperial prerogatives. He took the opportunity to press his own goals, such as the right of Prussia to recruit soldiers without imperial permission throughout the Empire. Here he foundered on the essential dichotomy between Prussian and wider imperial interests. The other rulers were not trying to weaken the Empire, but rather make it more effective by subordinating the emperor to the collective framework. The electors rejected his proposals and the princes remained excluded.³⁵

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The situation changed after Charles VII's election in January 1742. While he had no particular interest in Charles being a success, he needed to prevent him from failing. The situation established what was to remain another constant in Frederickian imperial policy. Frederick wanted to sustain the Empire as a passive, but autonomous entity beyond Austria's direct reach to provide security for Prussia's western provinces and to prevent the Habsburgs mobilising German resources against him. As long as Austria remained embattled with Bavaria, it could not devote its full resources to reconquer Silesia.³⁶ Whereas

³³ For the Austrian approach to the Swabian Kreis see HSAS, A202, Bü.1362. See generally W. Dotzauer: Die deutschen Reichskreise (1383-1806), Stuttgart 1998; N. Hammerstein: Zur Geschichte der Kreis-Assoziationen und der Assoziationsversuche zwischen 1714 und 1746, in: K.O. Frhr. v. Aretin (ed.): Der Kurfürst von Mainz und die Kreisassoziationen 1648-1746, Wiesbaden 1975, 79-120.

³⁴ HSAS, A202 Bü.1207; C14 Bü.597 including the cartel from 12 Jan.1742. See also Moser: Neues Teutsches Staatsrecht (FN 25), X, 267-275.

³⁵ Moser: Neues Teutsches Staatsrecht (FN 25), I, 297-336, IV, 89-145; A. Siemsen: Kurbrandenburgs Anteil an den kaiserlichen Wahlkapitulationen von 1689 bis 1742, Weimar 1909, 86ff.

³⁶ Or as Frederick put it in his *Histoire de mon temps*, in: Volz: Werke (FN 4), II, 129: 'The longer the war lasted, the more exhausted Austria became, and the longer Prussia enjoyed peace, the stronger she became'. (my

his predecessors had often been tardy in delivering their imperial obligations, Frederick paid 300,000 fl as Brandenburg and Pomerania's share of the imperial taxes voted by the Reichstag for the new emperor in November 1742. Given Bavaria's chronic lack of resources, this was just a drop in the ocean. The desire to provide Charles with a sufficient basis from which he could withstand Austria led Frederick to make a serious miscalculation later that year when he proposed the emperor should secularise some of the south German prince-bishoprics. The plan greatly alarmed the minor princes on whom both Prussia and Bavaria depended to prevent Austria mobilising the Kreise against them. The consequences became obvious in April 1743 when the Austrian candidate, Johann Friedrich Karl Count Ostein (1689-1763) beat his Wittelsbach rival in the contest to become the new elector of Mainz. Bamberg and Konstanz, as convenors (*Kreisausschreibende Fürsten*) of the Franconian and Swabian Kreise respectively, now swung behind Austria's call to reactivate the Association.³⁷

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The situation continued to deteriorate in 1743 as Britain mobilised the 'Pragmatic Army' in support of Austria and defeated the French at Dettingen.³⁸ Frederick used his visit to his Bayreuth relations in September 1743 to promote an alternative, pro-Bavarian Kreis Association that would fund an army of 36,000 under himself as imperial lieutenant general to uphold neutrality across the Empire. Even Charles VII rejected the scheme as blatantly favouring Prussia's interests.³⁹

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The failures of 1742-43 taught Frederick that formal institutions like the Kreise could not be manipulated at will. He now sought narrower, more modest alliances with key princes. These were still justified publicly as upholding the imperial constitution, but were better tailored to Prussia's specific needs of the moment. The strategic readjustment increased the dynastic element in Prussian imperial policy as Frederick posed as broker for princely ambitions. Hessen-Kassel had already approached him in 1743, offering 800 men for the Prussian army if Frederick helped the landgrave secure a new electoral title. The landgrave joined the elector Palatine in forming the Frankfurt Union with Prussia on 22 May 1744 to support Charles VII.⁴⁰ France agreed financial support in its treaty with Prussia on 6 June, while Charles VII accepted a plan to partition Bohemia in a new agreement with Frederick six

translation) For the following see also Hartmann: Karl Albrecht (FN 26), 258-262, 287-293.

³⁷ W. v. Hofmann: Das Säkularisationsprojekt von 1743, Kaiser Karl VII. und die römische Kurie, in: Riezler Festschrift. Beiträge zur Bayerischen Geschichte, Gotha 1913, 213-259; P. Baumgart: Säkularisationsprojekte König Friedrichs II. von Preußen, in: J. Köhler (ed.): Säkularisation in Ostmitteleuropa, Köln 1984, 59-64; Hartmann: Karl Albrecht (FN 26), 287-290; K.O. Frhr. v. Aretin: Das Alte Reich 1648-1806, 3 vols., Stuttgart 1993-97, II, 449-455.

³⁸ W. Handrick: Die Pragmatische Armee 1741-1743, München 1991; R. Lodge: The Treaty of Worms, in: English Historical Review 44 (1920), 220-255.

³⁹ G. Roloff: Friedrich und das Reich zwischen dem ersten und zweiten Schlesischen Krieg, in: Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und Preußischen Geschichte 25 (1913), 445-459; V. Press: Das wittelsbacher Kaisertum Karls VII. Voraussetzungen von Entstehung und Scheitern, in: ders.: Das Alte Reich. Ausgewählte Aufsätze, Berlin 1997, 223-259, at: 253-254.

⁴⁰ Frankfurt Union: Volz (ed.): II, 173, 194-195; V, 175-176; H. Weber: Die Politik des Kurfürsten Karl Theodor von der Pfalz während des Österreichischen Erbfolgekrieges (1742-1748), Bonn 1956.

weeks later. Frederick then re-entered the war, invading Bohemia in August to relieve the pressure on France in the Rhineland. Though the Austrians were in fact in no position to recover Lorraine that had been ceded to France in 1738, Frederick saw that duchy as the equivalent of Silesia. French possession of Lorraine gave it common ground with Prussia, since Austria resented the loss of both provinces.⁴¹

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Charles VII did promise Hessen-Kassel a new electoral title in return for joining the union, but Frederick was reluctant to see significant changes to the traditional hierarchy of imperial Estates and tried to redirect the landgrave's ambitions towards Brabant where they would harm Austria instead. Hessian relations cooled as a result, though they improved during the early 1750s when Frederick's brother, Prince Henry, married the landgrave's daughter.⁴² Frederick also found it difficult to extend the Frankfurt Union. His Wolfenbüttel relations accepted closer dynastic ties to Prussia, but kept their options open as the duke's brother, Ludwig Ernst (1718-88), served in the Austrian and later Dutch armies. Negotiations with Hessen-Darmstadt initially appeared more promising, because its Alsatian enclave of Hanau-Lichtenberg was susceptible to French pressure, while the hereditary prince, the future Ludwig IX (1719-90, r.1768), openly admired Prussia. Ludwig did enter Prussian service in 1743 together with his younger brother, Georg, (1722-82), but their father refused to transfer soldiers or join the Union.⁴³ Once Prussia again made peace with Austria in 1745, Hessen-Darmstadt swung back to its traditional alliance with the Habsburgs and supplied two regiments to their Dutch allies.⁴⁴ Georg left Prussian service in 1747, though his brother remained for a further decade. These demonstrations of loyalty to the Habsburgs were rewarded by the grant of unlimited exemption from imperial jurisdiction by Francis I, effective from October 1748.⁴⁵

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The efforts to win over Württemberg are worth exploring in detail, because they reveal both the methods and the limits of Frederick's imperial policy. Though physically distant, Württemberg was susceptible to Prussian pressure and offered a good opportunity for Frederick to combat Habsburg influence in Swabia. Like Hessen-Darmstadt, it feared France that had occupied nine of its Mömpelgard lordships west of the Rhine and hoped that Prussia would use its influence to recover them.⁴⁶ Prussia had already promised assistance over Mömpelgard in its alliance with Württemberg in

⁴¹ M. Braubach: *Diplomatie und geistiges Leben*, Bonn 1969, 464-481.

⁴² L. Pelizeaus: *Der Aufstieg Württembergs und Hessens zur Kurwürde 1692-1806*, Frankfurt a. M. 2000, 334-365.

⁴³ GStA PK, I HA Rep.96 Geheimes Zivilkabinet Teil 2, Nr.104 Lit A correspondence with Ludwig VIII and Ludwig IX.

⁴⁴ Staatsarchiv Darmstadt, E8 B260-264.

⁴⁵ Pelizeaus: *Aufstieg* (FN 42), 495-510.

⁴⁶ See W. Scherb: *Die politischen Beziehungen der Grafschaft Mömpelgard zu Württemberg von 1723 bis zur französischen Revolution*, Tübingen 1981.

1709 that was renewed in 1716 and extended for another twelve years in 1731.⁴⁷ These treaties had little effect beyond providing an excuse for Prussian recruiting in Swabia that the duchy increasingly resented.⁴⁸ The changed circumstances of the 1740s offered a possible basis for a closer partnership, and already in 1741 Württemberg sought Frederick's help in recovering the Mömpelgard lordships.⁴⁹ The duchy was then under a regency during Duke Karl Eugen's minority after the death of his pro-Habsburg father, Duke Karl Alexander in 1737. The regency passed to Duke Karl Friedrich of Württemberg-Oels (1690-1761) in 1738, giving Prussia further opportunities to exert pressure once it had conquered Silesia.⁵⁰ Two months prior to the invasion, the regent had opened negotiations to transfer part of Württemberg's expensive army to Prussia after repeated disappointments with Austria. The situation became critical after December 1740, because the duchy was still bound by the late duke's alliance with Austria from 1733. Aware of this, Frederick drew the Württembergers in with enticing offers that he then delayed delivering until they had over-committed themselves. In return for a loan of 100,000 talers, the duchy agreed to transfer an infantry regiment of 1,600 men, as well as a further 2,000 recruits in 1741.⁵¹ It subsequently supplied a cavalry regiment of 600 men as well.⁵²

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When Karl Eugen and his two younger brothers went to Berlin in December 1741 it was widely thought Frederick was holding them hostage to keep Württemberg on his side. Their journey in fact stemmed from local motives that played into Frederick's hands. The princes' father was a convert to Catholicism, while their mother was Maria Augusta (1706-56) from the Catholic Thurn und Taxis family. The Württemberg Estates and their Lutheran allies in the duchy's privy council were deeply alarmed at the growth of Catholic influence and had staged a coup, displacing Maria Augusta from a political role in the regency in 1737. This incurred Austrian distrust and led the Estates to back the new regent's negotiations with Prussia. The influential privy councillor Georg Bernhard Bilfinger (1693-1750) saw the despatch of the princes to Berlin as an opportunity to have them educated at a Protestant court.⁵³ Maria Augusta fell in with this plan, because she saw it as a chance to remove her

⁴⁷ GStA PK, I HA Rep.11, Nr.305 Fasz.92. Treaties printed in: V. Loewe (ed.): *Preussens Staatsverträge aus der Regierungszeit Friedrichs I.*, Berlin 1923, 105-107; V. Loewe (ed.): *Preussens Staatsverträge aus der Regierungszeit Friedrich Wilhelms I.*, Berlin 1913, 165-168, 399-404.

⁴⁸ HSAS, A6 Bü.60; A202 Bü.2196, 2226, 2235.

⁴⁹ HSAS, A202 Bü.1208, Frederick II to Regent Friedrich Karl 26 Sept.1741.

⁵⁰ For the Württemberg-Oels branch see H. Schukraft: *Die Linie Württemberg-Oels*, in: R. Uhlend (ed.): *900 Jahre Haus Württemberg*, Stuttgart 1984, 379-389. Though lacking the full status of imperial princes, the dukes of Oels enjoyed a distinct position within Silesia as autonomous hereditary princes.

⁵¹ The regent had already approached Frederick William II in 1738 for help in obtaining pay arrears from Austria for auxiliaries supplied since 1733: HSAS, A202 Bü.2112, 25 Aug.1738. The loan was secured by the duchy's Estates, but paid into the ducal treasury, see A256 Bd.227 fol.6. For the transfer of the infantry, see A202 Bü.2113, 2254.

⁵² HSAS, A202 1208, 2113-2114.

⁵³ For the coup and subsequent regency see P.H. Wilson: *War, state and society in Württemberg 1677-1793*, Cambridge 1995, 184-189. For Bilfinger, see E. Schmid: *Geheimrat Georg Bernhard Bilfinger (1693-1750)*, in: *Zeitschrift für württembergische Landesgeschichte* 3 (1939), 370-422. For Maria Augusta, see P.H. Wilson: *Women and imperial politics: The Württemberg Consorts 1674-1757*, in: Orr (ed.): *Queenship (FN19)*, 221-251,

sons from the influence of the privy council and the Estates, and she deliberately played on their fears of Catholicism to encourage their agreement. She also saw the transfer of Württemberg regiments to Prussia as a way of re-launching their military careers that had foundered when Austria disbanded two other units transferred earlier to its army.⁵⁴ Above all, she wanted Karl Eugen to marry a Hohenzollern prince and cooperated with Bilfinger to have the prince travel to Berlin via Bayreuth rather than the route preferred by Privy Councillor Hardenberg through the Hague.

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Maria Augusta travelled to Berlin herself in February 1742 to promote her son's marriage. She initially favoured Frederick's sister, Anna Amalia (1723-87), but decided against her as she was four years older than her son who had already fallen in love with the king's niece, Elisabeth Friederike Sophie (1732-80), whom he had met in Bayreuth. The scheme was promoted by Jean Baptiste de Boyer, marquis d'Argens (1704-71), a former French attaché at the Porte and a failed novelist who travelled to Berlin in Maria Augusta's entourage and was said to be her lover. The duchess discussed the matter with the Prussian dowager queen, Sophie Dorothea (1687-1757), Frederick's mother. However, Frederick saw a chance to bind Württemberg more closely to its Prussian alliance and assigned a senior courtier, Baron Gotter, to watch over the prince. He also flattered Maria Augusta by conferring the Order of the Black Eagle in October 1741 and by allowing her to remain honorary colonel of the Württemberg cavalry regiment when it transferred to Prussia in 1742. Karl Eugen was made a Prussian colonel on 13 November 1742 and given command of the new infantry regiment formed from Württemberg recruits in 1743. His next eldest brother, Ludwig Eugen (1731-95) was also given rank of colonel of a Prussian dragoon regiment in August 1742.⁵⁵

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To maintain the upper hand in the negotiations, Frederick exploited the struggle between the two Württemberg factions that had accompanied the prince to Berlin. Rightfully suspicious of Maria Augusta's intentions, the Lutheran party had despatched Privy Councillor Johann Eberhard Georgii

at: 240-246.

⁵⁴ Maria Augusta negotiated directly with Brigade-Major von Kalnein, the Prussian agent who had negotiated the Treaty of Ulm in 1741, as well as the transfer of the Württemberg infantry: HSAS, G197 Bü.18. See also T. Schön: Herzogin Maria Augusta von Württemberg, in: Diözesanarchiv von Schwaben 25 (1907), 81-90, 125-134, 148-150, 177-184, continued in Schwäbisches Archiv 26 (1908), 27-29, 46-48, 61-63, 91-96, 110-111, 164-169, 189-192, *ibid.*: 27 (1909), 61-63, 77-78, 137-140, *ibid.*: 28 (1910), 27-30, 109-112, 168-172, *ibid.*: 29 (1911), 45-47, 141-144, *ibid.*: 30 (1912), 11-16, at: 26 (1908), 111, 164-165; K.F. Dizinger: Beiträge zur Geschichte Württembergs und seines Regentenhauses zur Zeit der Regierung Herzog Karl Alexanders, 2 vols., Tübingen 1834, II, 47-108, 128-138. For the prince's stay in Berlin see R. Bérenguier: Der Besuch der württembergischen Prinzen zur Zeit König Friedrich des Großen in Berlin und ihre Beziehungen zum preußischen Königshaus, Berlin 1879; P. Stark: Fürstliche Personen des Hauses Württemberg und ihre bewährten Diener im Zeitalter Friedrichs des Großen, Stuttgart 1876.

⁵⁵ Maria Augusta acted as colonel of the Württemberg Cuirassier Regiment raised in 1736 that transferred to become Prussian Dragoon Regt. No.12. Several of its officers had been implicated in a failed coup plot in 1738 to restore her to the regency and at least one was rumoured to be her lover: HSAS, L5 Tom.146, fol.193-6, 354-385; E. Lempp: Weissensees Sturz, in: Blätter für württembergische Kirchengeschichte 32 (1928), 234-253, at: 243-247.

(1694-1772) who kept Bilfinger informed about events in Berlin.⁵⁶ Georgii divulged all the details of Maria Augusta's schemes to Gotter, as well as reporting on her scandalous private life. She fell out with d'Argens who had become a close confidant of Frederick, and she aroused the jealousy of Frederick's two sisters in Berlin. Meanwhile, Frederick himself complained that her regiment had suffered unacceptably high desertion since entering Prussian service.⁵⁷ However, political interest outweighed family sentiment, and Frederick overruled his sister Wilhelmine's objections and agreed provisionally on 6 May 1742 that Karl Eugen would marry Elisabeth Friederike.

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Maria Augusta was obliged to leave Berlin, while Frederick used the excuse of the renewed Austrian offensive in southern Germany to detain the princes, claiming it was too dangerous for them to return home. However, the duchess was more than a match for the king when it came to intrigue. She was not only determined to hold Frederick to the proposed marriage, but devised a plan to end the regency by having Karl Eugen declared of age. This would force Frederick to release her sons, and make her the power behind the Württemberg throne. Thanks to her Thurn und Taxis parentage, she had considerable influence at the imperial court of Charles VII. Her family held the imperial post monopoly and had supplied troops to the Bavarian army. She asked her mother, Maria Ludovika Anna (1683-1750) to take up her case, as well as employing Friedrich Carl von Schönborn (1674-1746) who had been named the boys' guardian in her husband's will and, as bishop of Bamberg and Würzburg, had considerable influence in imperial politics.⁵⁸

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Increasingly exasperated by her plotting, Frederick referred to her as 'Medea' and refused to let her return to Berlin. Instead she travelled to Bayreuth in September 1743 to hasten the conclusion of the marriage, enlisting the prospective parents-in-law by claiming that Frederick was arranging an alternative Wolfenbüttel match for Elisabeth Friederike. Meanwhile, her interests were represented in Berlin by Friedrich Carl Baron de Montolieu (1704-61) who headed her court and was tutor to the two younger princes.⁵⁹ The princes' health deteriorated throughout the winter of 1742-3 and their

⁵⁶ Their correspondence for 1741-1743 is in LBS, cod.hist. qt.258. For the marriage negotiations, see also P. Stälin: Friederike, in: Herzog Karl Eugen und seine Zeit, issued by the Württembergische Geschichts- und Altertumsverein, 2 vols., Esslingen 1907-1909, I, 55-78; E. Krüger: Herzogin Elisabeth Sophie Friederike von Württemberg und andere Frauen am Hofe Herzog Carl Eugens, in: Ludwigsburger Geschichtsblätter 51 (1997), 101-118. For Georgii see W. Pfeilsticker: Neues württembergisches Dienerbuch, 3 vols., Stuttgart 1957-1974, nos.1101, 1138, 1217, 1652, 1655, 1659, 2015, 2276.

⁵⁷ HSAS, A202 Bü.2114, 29 June 1742. For contemporary anecdotes about the duchess' behaviour, see A. Fauchier-Magnan: The small German courts in the eighteenth century, London 1958, 162-166.

⁵⁸ Copy of Karl Alexander's will in HSAS, L5 Tom.145, fol.132-134. See also Hartmann: Karl Albrecht (FN 26), 257, 269.

⁵⁹ For F.C. de Montolieu see Pfeilsticker: Dienerbuch (FN 56), nos.34, 200, 379. He was probably a relation of Louis de Montolieu, a Languedoc Protestant refugee in Berlin who became her lover and was attached as Württemberg captain in December 1741 to supervise the princes: HSAS, a30c Bd.7 fol.222-223; Pfeilsticker: Dienerbuch (FN 56), no.18; Fauchier-Magnan: German courts (FN 57), 165-166, 169.

increasingly vocal appeals to return home were becoming an embarrassment for Frederick.⁶⁰ He met the duchess in Bayreuth in November 1743 while on his tour to rally support for his Kreis Association plan.⁶¹ He agreed to her demands in order to retain Württemberg's goodwill, believing that by assisting to secure Karl Eugen's majority he would win the young duke's gratitude. Negotiations were opened through the Bayreuth privy councillor, Friedrich Samuel Baron Montmartin (1712-78), but Charles VII made his agreement dependent on Württemberg allying with him. Frederick tried to get this written into the treaty without informing either Maria Augusta or the Württemberg regency government, but was foiled by Montolieu who discovered the plan.⁶² The emperor duly proclaimed Karl Eugen of age on 7 January 1744.⁶³

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Frederick was determined not to release the princes without an assurance of Württemberg's loyalty, delaying their departure until the duchy renewed the 1731 alliance that had expired the previous year. He was assisted by the duchy's own representative, Christoph Dietrich Keller (1699-1766) who had already exceeded his instructions when negotiating the troop transfer in 1741 and saw closer ties to Prussia as a way of advancing his own career. Keller worked with Georgii to convince the regency government of the necessity of agreeing to Frederick's terms. Württemberg was, they said, too deeply embroiled to pull out now without offending Prussia. Prussia could also provide assistance over Mömpelgard since it was an ally of France, while the renewed treaty would strengthen ties to the emperor. The regency gave in and accepted Frederick's alliance on 31 January 1744, renewing the earlier treaty for a further 20 years, promising not to assist Austria and to supply another 1,200 recruits to Prussia.⁶⁴

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Frederick had hoped to keep the princes in Berlin until May while he completed his arrangements for the Frankfurt Union, but he had run out of excuses and was obliged to let them depart on 8 February. They travelled home via Erlangen where they met their mother and sister and where Karl Eugen was betrothed to Elisabeth Friederike, before arriving in Stuttgart on 10 March.⁶⁵ Frederick distributed rewards to retain the cooperation of key figures at the Württemberg court. Keller received cash, while

⁶⁰ Their letters of complaint to their mother are in HSAS, G197 Bü19. She clearly fanned their discontent to put pressure on Frederick.

⁶¹ Volz: Werke (FN 4), II, 150.

⁶² T. Schön: Maria Augusta (FN 54), at: (1909), 138-140, (1910), 27-29, 109-110. Montmartin later played a prominent role in Württemberg politics, see G. Haug-Moritz: Friedrich Samuel Graf Montmartin als württembergischer Staatsmann (1756-1766/73), in: Zeitschrift für württembergische Landesgeschichte 53 (1994), 205-226.

⁶³ HSAS L5 Tom.151, fol.429-430.

⁶⁴ HSAS A202 Bü.1206, advice to the regency government dated 20 Jan.1744, with copy of the treaty dated 31 Jan. For Keller, see G. Haug-Moritz: Württembergischer Ständekonflikt und deutscher Dualismus, Stuttgart 1992, 299-308.

⁶⁵ Details of the betrothal in HSAS L5 Tom.152 fol.39-40.

Georgii's son, Christian Eberhard, who had transferred with Maria Augusta's dragoon regiment into Prussian service was promoted to lieutenant.⁶⁶ The duchy's corrupt master of horse, Heinrich Günther Reinhard Baron Roeder von Schwende (†1751), was to receive the Order of the Black Eagle, though he does not appear to have obtained this - probably because Frederick discovered that reports of his influence over Karl Eugen had been exaggerated. Meanwhile, Rudolph Baron von Laubsky (1700-54), the senior Württemberg officer supervising the princes in Berlin, was given the honorific title of Prussian major general.⁶⁷ Hoping that Karl Eugen would see it as a mark of esteem, Frederick sent Lieutenant General Count Dohna to join Baron Friedrich Christoph von Geuder as Prussian representatives in Stuttgart in mid-July 1744.⁶⁸

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However, with the princes safely back in Stuttgart, he now had considerably less leverage over Württemberg when he wrote in March 1744 asking Karl Eugen to join the Frankfurt Union.⁶⁹ With Frederick offering little beyond vague assurances over Mömpelgard, Karl Eugen was not prepared to go beyond a promise not to support an anti-Prussian coalition. His advisors favoured a more independent Kreis Association to sustain genuine neutrality, mobilising additional troops in collaboration with their Swabian neighbours. Keller, still in Berlin, was instructed to promote this and it remained Württemberg's position throughout the remainder of the war.⁷⁰ Frederick lost ground in the duchy as the Estates concluded their own agreement with Maria Augusta behind the privy council's back, paying her a generous allowance from public taxes in return for her persuading Karl Eugen to retain Stuttgart as his capital rather than move the court back to Ludwigsburg.⁷¹ General Dohna was already recalled on 15 August, while Geuder left in January 1745.⁷²

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Frederick's experience with Württemberg reveals how difficult it was for Prussia to influence other imperial Estates. Charles VII's death coincided with Geuder's recall and destroyed the basis of the Frankfurt Union. Frederick saved his position through force of arms, defeating Austria and its Saxon allies in the 1745 campaign and securing the very favourable Peace of Dresden that included Habsburg acknowledgement of Prussia's possession of Silesia and Glatz. Frederick went to

⁶⁶ He later returned to Württemberg and served as captain in the duchy's Kreis Dragoner: HSAS A202 Bü.2257 4 Nov.1750. See also Haug-Moritz: *Württembergischer Ständekonflikt* (FN 64), 132 n.33.

⁶⁷ Laubsky was another of the Württemberg cavalry officers closely associated with Maria Augusta. He returned to Stuttgart with Karl Eugen and died later as General of Cavalry and Württemberg commander-in-chief: HSAS, A30a Bd.6 fol.174; Bd.7 fol.189; L5 Tom.162 fol.399-400; Priesdorff: *Soldatisches Führertum* (FN 18), I, 300.

⁶⁸ HSAS, A202 Bü.1209.

⁶⁹ Gustav Berthold Volz (ed.): *Politische Correspondenz Friedrich's des Großen*. Band 3 (1744), Berlin 1879, 333, 366.

⁷⁰ A. Schmid: *Max III. Joseph* (FN 28), 62-63, 219-223.

⁷¹ The secret payments can be traced through HSAS, A256 Bd.222-229; G197 Bü.13. See also Schön: *Maria Augusta* (FN54), at: (1910), 111, 169; (1911), 46-47, 143-144; (1912), 11-14.

⁷² HSAS, A202 Bü.1209.

considerable lengths to obtain formal recognition of this arrangement through the Reichstag, sending his adjutant, Baron von der Goltz, on an extended tour of the German princely courts to win support, especially from the Catholics. He received only vague promises and the Reichstag only recognised Prussian possession of Silesia in 1751 when it guaranteed the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle that had ended the War of the Austrian Succession three years earlier.⁷³

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However, peace meant that Prussia could no longer apply direct force to get its way, compelling Frederick to remain involved in imperial politics. The circumstances had changed significantly, as the Habsburgs recovered the imperial title with the election of Maria Theresia's husband, Francis Stephen, in September 1745. The new emperor attempted to rebuild Habsburg influence by insisting on strict observance of formal imperial prerogatives.⁷⁴ This pushed Frederick into the role of leader of the constitutional opposition as he combated Habsburg efforts to instrumentalise imperial powers. Initially, his efforts were directed against an attempt to mobilise the Empire against his French allies as the war continued in 1746. Supported by Mainz and Bamberg, Austria already proposed renewing the Kreis Association in October 1745. Prussia worked through its allies in Ansbach, Bayreuth and Württemberg to thwart this. Frederick achieved his objective with relative ease since the princes had good reasons of their own to stay out of the war.⁷⁵ Mainz convened another meeting in Frankfurt at the beginning of 1746, but Württemberg led the Swabian delegation in walking out that June. The Franconian, Electoral and Upper Rhenish representatives agreed an alliance in February 1747, admitting Austria in July and formally renewed the old 1714 Association on 1 March 1748. Ansbach, Bayreuth and Württemberg remained opposed, not because they wished to please Prussia, but rather to avoid being dragged into supporting Austria's war effort.⁷⁶

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The relatively lukewarm response to Frederick's initiatives stemmed from growing resentment at Prussian recruiting that was widely regarded as an infringement of territorial autonomy and a threat to neutrality.⁷⁷ Frederick already accused Württemberg of stirring its Swabian neighbours against France during operations in southern Germany in March 1745. The situation worsened the following month when the duchy arrested a Prussian officer sent ostensibly to pursue deserters under the 1742 cartel, but who was caught trying to entice Württemberg soldiers into Prussian service.⁷⁸ Karl Eugen responded to Prussian protests by refusing to renew the cartel when it expired later that year.⁷⁹

⁷³ Schmid: Max III. Joseph (FN 28), 209-211; Aretin: Altes Reich (FN 37), III, 90.

⁷⁴ Aretin: Altes Reich (FN 37), III, 59-63.

⁷⁵ GStA PK, I HA Rep.11 Nr.305, Fasz.149.

⁷⁶ HSAS, A202 Bü.1157; Hammerstein: Kreis-Assoziationen (FN 33), 113-118.

⁷⁷ For mounting complaints, see HSAS, A202 Bü.1207, 1210, 2299; C14 Bü.68, 69, 597.

⁷⁸ HSAS, A202 Bü.1210 esp. 28 April 1745.

⁷⁹ HSAS, A202 Bü.1207 esp. 17 Nov.1745. Also, C14 Bü.69.

Frederick instructed his representative in Paris to stop pressing Württemberg's case over Mömpelgard in March 1747.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, ducal officials arrested further Prussian officers whom the duke refused to release. Württembergers deserting Prussia were given shelter, while those still enlisting in Frederick's army had their property confiscated. Frederick began writing personal letters to the duke as individual cases were brought to his attention from 1748, and of the seven officers arrested 1752-4, at least five were released.⁸¹ Nonetheless, Württemberg's tougher stance emboldened its weaker neighbours to defy Prussia. For example, the imperial city of Rottweil also arrested a Prussian lieutenant in 1754.⁸² Such action not only threatened essential recruitment, but also challenged Prussia's status. Frederick refused to accept his officers being tried by either local or imperial courts. In a notorious case, Ulm had imprisoned Lieutenant Hans Ernst von Heyden who had suffocated a student in a botched kidnap attempt in 1754. He was sprung from jail two years later by five Prussian soldiers sent in disguise, and though tried again in Prussia, he only served a month of his one year sentence.⁸³

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Such actions threatened to isolate Prussia within imperial politics and frustrate Frederick's policy of rallying support to block Habsburg measures. He developed a number of strategies in the later 1740s to improve relations and attract a more reliable clientele within the Empire. One option was to play the confessional card by exploiting real or alleged infringements of Protestant rights to mobilise the imperial Estates against the emperor. This offered relatively good prospects since this would enable him to meet the Habsburgs on their chosen ground of the imperial constitution. However, Frederick was unable to develop this prior to the Seven Years War, because Hanover and Saxony were both allies of Austria and opposed the instrumentalisation of confessional issues. Like his predecessors, Frederick was unable to displace Saxony from its formal leadership of the *corpus evangelicorum*, the powerful lobby group of Protestant imperial Estates. The corpus was, in any case, ill-suited to his objective of proving that Prussia offered a better guarantee for the constitutional order than Austria. Frederick did not want to alarm the minor Catholic imperial Estates by assuming a sectarian stance. It was unclear whether the corpus could act unilaterally under imperial law, and Frederick remained in the background when other members invoked the dubious right of self-help to circumvent the formal procedures of the public peace.⁸⁴ Instead, Frederick concentrated on less confrontational actions

⁸⁰ E. Schneider: Regierung, in: Herzog Karl Eugen, I, 147-167 at: 148-149; E. Boepple: Friedrich des Großen Verhältnis zu Württemberg, München 1915, 34-35.

⁸¹ HSAS, A202 Bü.2299. This became common practice after 1763: GStA PK, I HA, Rep.11 Nr.305, Fasz.152, 163, 184, 193, 198, 203, 211, 212, 214, 215, 218-222.

⁸² HSAS, C14 Bü.597.

⁸³ Jany: Armee (FN 10), II, 246-247.

⁸⁴ Ansbach intervened over the attempted imposition of Catholicism in Hohenlohe-Waldenburg in 1750, and again, with Wolfenbüttel, in 1755-56 when the Calvinist count of Wied-Runkel permitted the Capuchins to build a monastery: J. Vötsch: Die Hohenloher Religionsstreitigkeiten in der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts, in: Württembergisch Franken 77 (1993), 361-400.; J. Luh: Unheiliges Römisches Reich. Der konfessionelle Gegensatz 1648 bis 1806, Potsdam 1995, 25, 60-61. For the ambiguous position of the corpus evangelicorum see D. Stievermann: Politik und Konfession im 18. Jahrhundert, in: Zeitschrift für historische Forschung 18

intended to stabilise his princely allies and establish his credentials as a good Protestant. Already in 1744 he guaranteed the *Reversalien* that had guaranteed the rights of the Lutheran Württembergers under the rule of their now Catholic dynasty.⁸⁵ He did the same ten years later when the landgrave of Hessen-Kassel discovered that his son had converted as well.⁸⁶

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Prussia offered mediation in other internal problems, likewise seeking to resolve matters in its favour. Such actions implicitly challenged imperial authority. In place of resolution through established institutions under the aegis of the emperor, there was now informal arbitration relying on Prussia's prestige rather than imperial law. The first came in 1746 at the request of Duke Friedrich III of Gotha (1699-1772, r.1732) to support his claims to the regency in Weimar and to defend his interests in a dispute with his wife's relations in Meiningen. Gotha was still a territory of some importance, supplying 3,600 auxiliaries to the Dutch in 1744-49. In return for Prussian support, Gotha transferred 583 soldiers to Prussia in February 1746 and let it recruit in Eisenach after 1748. Duchess Luise Dorothea (1710-67) also became Frederick's principal confidant after the death of his sister Wilhelmine in 1758.⁸⁷ Gotha continued to support Prussia into the 1750s, following Frederick in concluding an alliance with Hanover and providing 800 men to help defend the electorate during the Seven Years War. Friedrich III declined the emperor's offer of the post of Upper Saxon Kreis convenor in 1756 and discretely supported Prussia in the Reichstag until November 1758 when Austrian pressure compelled it to back the imperial war effort.⁸⁸

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Whereas Gotha provided useful assistance in the Empire, intervention in Mecklenburg-Schwerin involved Hohenzollern interests more directly. The duke had accepted Hohenzollern claims to inherit the duchy in return for support against his recalcitrant Estates in two treaties in 1708 and 1717.⁸⁹ Hanover and Wolfenbüttel executed an imperial court order against the duke in 1719 who was later deposed by Charles VI. Prussia had been deliberately excluded from these arrangements, but regained influence thanks to Frederick William I's rapprochement with the emperor after 1726.

(1991), 177-199; G. Haug-Moritz: *Corpus evangelicorum und deutscher Dualismus*, in: *Press: Alternativen* (FN 8), 189-207.

⁸⁵ H. Tüchle: *Die Kirchenpolitik des Herzogs Karl Alexander von Württemberg 1733-1737*, Würzburg 1939, 33-44; Haug-Moritz: *Württembergischer Ständekonflikt* (FN 64), 190-197, 205-214.

⁸⁶ K.E. Demandt: *Geschichte des Landes Hessen*, Kassel 1980, 277-278; Aretin: *Altes Reich* (FN 37), III, 79-81.

⁸⁷ Jany: *Armee* (FN 10), II, 181; H. Patze / W. Schlesinger (eds.): *Geschichte Thüringens*, vol. V. *Politische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, Köln 1982, 431-435, 479-485. M.H. Cottoni (ed.): *Correspondance de Frédéric II avec Louise Dorothee de Saxe-Gotha (1740-1767)*, Oxford 1999.

⁸⁸ A. Brabant: *Das Heilige Römische Reich teutscher Nation im Kampf mit Friedrich dem Großen*, 3 vols., Berlin 1904, I, 64-74; G. Niethammer: *Die Reichsarmee im Feldzug 1757*, in: *Beiheft zum Militärwochenblatt 9* (1879), 149-204.

⁸⁹ Loewe: *Friedrich I.* (FN 47), 92-96; Loewe: *Friedrich Wilhelm I.* (FN 47), 177-185. For the dispute, see P. Wick: *Versuche zur Errichtung des Absolutismus in Mecklenburg in der ersten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1964, 234-259; M. Hughes: *Law and politics in eighteenth-century Germany. The Imperial Aulic Council in the reign of Charles VI*, Woodbridge 1988, 261-265.

Prussian troops occupied four Mecklenburg districts in 1733, ostensibly to restore order after a rebellion against the administration of Duke Christian Louis (1683-1756). The latter sought greater independence once the emperor recognised him as ruling duke in 1747. However, a new crisis developed as he agreed with his Strelitz relations to end the union of the Mecklenburg Estates that underpinned the duchy's constitution. The Reichshofrat failed to resolve the question, enabling Frederick to step in after October 1754 to broker his own solution. Agreed as the hereditary pact (*Erbvergleich*) in 1755, this entrenched the supremacy of the knights over duke, peasants and towns in a conservative arrangement dictating the duchy's internal affairs until 1918. This decidedly unenlightened arrangement suited Frederick's objectives by denying the duke any chance to acquire the means to oppose further Prussian encroachment on his territory. The last of the Schwarzburg peacekeepers transferred to the Prussian army in 1755, while Prussian officers raided the duchy for recruits. The new duke Friedrich II (1717-85, r.1756) did assemble his own small army of 1,000 men and backed Austria in the Reichstag at the start of the Seven Years War, hoping that successful imperial action against Frederick would finally free him from Prussian tutelage. Prussia invaded and the duke's small army had to be evacuated to Swedish Pomerania to avoid capture.⁹⁰

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Frederick also pursued Hohenzollern claims in his dealings with his Franconian relations in Ansbach and Bayreuth. His father had been thwarted in 1722 by Charles VI who annulled the favourable inheritance treaty negotiated by Frederick I nineteen years earlier. Frederick William responded by persuading the two margraves to marry his daughters. Ansbach nonetheless struggled to avoid Prussia's grip, but lack of British, Dutch and Austrian support forced Margrave Karl Wilhelm Friedrich (1712-57, r.1724) to approach Frederick in 1751 and accept a new inheritance treaty the following year. Known as the *Pactum Fridericianum*, this allowed the mutual inheritance of Ansbach and Bayreuth should either line die out, with Prussia inheriting both on the death of the survivor. Like Mecklenburg, Ansbach saw the Seven Years War as an opportunity to escape Prussian influence and signed treaties with Austria and France in March-April 1757 and experienced a similar fate as Prussian troops raided Franconia. The new margrave changed tactics later in 1757, formally supporting the imperial war effort, but covertly working alongside Gotha to oppose it in the Reichstag. Whereas the Hohenzollerns never inherited Mecklenburg, Frederick's intervention did pave the way for Prussia's acquisition of Ansbach and Bayreuth when the last margrave abdicated in return for a pension in 1792.⁹¹

⁹⁰ W. v. Schultz: Die preußischen Werbungen unter Friedrich Wilhelm I und Friedrich dem Großen bis zum Beginn des Siebenjährigen Krieges, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung Mecklenburg-Schwerins, Schwerin 1887; M. Manke / E. Münch (eds.): Verfassung und Lebenswirklichkeit. Der Landesgrundgesetzliche Erbvergleich von 1755 in seiner Zeit, Lübeck 2006.

⁹¹ R. Endres: Preußens Griff nach Franken, in: Duchhardt: Friedrich der Große (FN 1), 57-79; M. Hanisch: Friedrich II. und die preußische Sukzession in Franken in der internationalen Diskussion, in *ibid.*: 81-91.

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In addition to intervention in territorial affairs, Frederick also acted less directly to win the support of the more influential princes. The larger principalities of the south and west had long resented the autonomy of the imperial knights who, while lacking the status of full imperial Estates, nonetheless enjoyed immediacy under the emperor (*Reichsunmittelbarkeit*). This prevented the princes from incorporating the knights' fiefs that represented intrusive enclaves in territories like Bayreuth, Württemberg and the Palatinate. These three began a sustained campaign of encroachment against the Franconian, Swabian and Rhenish knights in 1746. Their appeal to Prussia for assistance in 1749 placed Frederick in a difficult position. He did not want to alienate these princes who were among the most important of his potential supporters in the Empire. Prussia could use its influence in imperial institutions to back legal measures against the knights. However, it could not match Habsburg influence in the imperial courts to which the knights appealed for injunctions against the princes. In addition, many knights served or had relations in the Prussian army. Frederick thus provided support, but not enough for the princes to achieve their objectives. Increasingly disillusioned with Prussia, the princes made their own separate settlements with the knights by 1754.⁹²

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The episode illustrates a fundamental difficulty of Frederick's imperial policy. The king found that intervention in one aspect of imperial politics often produced negative results elsewhere, preventing him from assembling the critical mass of minor imperial Estates needed to block Habsburg measures. This can be illustrated by exploring the effect of Prussian involvement in regional politics. Prussia's involvement in Swabia fuelled existing competition between the two leading Protestant principalities of Württemberg and Baden-Durlach. Prussia's support for the former incurred the hostility of the latter, not least because the 1709 treaty with Württemberg included support for a court faction bitterly opposed by Baden-Durlach.⁹³ The accession of a Catholic line in Württemberg after 1733 intensified the local rivalry, because the Durlach margraves hoped they could supplant the dukes as the Protestant Kreis convenor in Swabia. Any hopes of exploiting the Württemberg regency after 1737 were dashed by a similar minority in Durlach a year later that saw the government of Karl August (1712-86) for his nephew Karl Friedrich (1728-1811) until 1746. Württemberg had carefully sponsored Karl August's career in the Swabian general staff and he briefly served as commander of the duchy's own army 1749-52.⁹⁴ However, his ambitions lay in imperial service where he already held general's rank since 1735, while his younger brother Christoph II (1717-89) transferred with a Württemberg

⁹² V. Press: Kaiser und Reichsritterschaft, in: R. Endres (ed.): Adel in der Frühneuzeit, Köln 1991, 163-194; V. Press: Der württembergische Angriff auf die Reichsritterschaft 1749-1754 (1770), in: F. Quarthal (ed.): Zwischen Schwarzwald und Schwäbischer Alb. Das Land am oberen Neckar, Sigmaringen 1984, 329-348.

⁹³ Frederick I promised asylum for the duke's mistress and her relations, while his estranged wife was a Baden-Durlach princess. See S. Oßwald-Bargende: Die Mätresse, der Fürst und die Macht. Christina Wilhelmina von Grävenitz und die höfische Gesellschaft, Frankfurt a. M. 2000.

⁹⁴ HSAS, A6 Bü.19; A202, Bü.2275; C14 Bü.87a esp. 9 May 1760 detailing his career. His co-regent 1738-1746 was the margrave's widow, Magdalene Wilhelmine (1677-1742).

regiment to the Austrian army in 1738.⁹⁵ As Württemberg edged towards Prussia after 1740, Durlach moved in the opposite direction. Karl August let his brother recruit an infantry regiment for Sardinia, a Habsburg ally, in 1742, whereas Württemberg refused permission.⁹⁶ Another regiment was raised for the Dutch in 1748, while Margrave Karl Friedrich married Karoline Luise of Hessen-Darmstadt (1723-83) three years later when her father had resumed his Austrian alliance.

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The regional balance tipped the other way with the reversal of international alliances at the onset of the Seven Years War. Whereas Karl Eugen pinned his ambitions firmly on an Austro-French alliance by 1757, Durlach had to be coerced into supporting the imperial war effort. Karl August did serve as an imperial general, but his nephew, the reigning margrave, admired Frederick and saw a chance to turn the tables on Württemberg. He was encouraged by Baron Wilhelm von Edelsheim, the younger brother of Georg Ludwig (1740-1814) who was to play an important role in the *Fürstenbund* negotiations in the 1780s. The Edelsheim family had connections to the Gotha court, including the former Württemberg diplomat Keller who had gone there in 1751, and opened secret negotiations through these with Prussia in 1760. Durlach hoped to gain territory in addition to the convenor's post and Prussian backing for its claims to Baden-Baden. The military situation prevented Durlach openly declaring its hand, but the contacts did result in Prussia brokering an inheritance treaty between the two Baden lines in 1765 that led to Durlach's acquisition of Baden-Baden six years later.⁹⁷

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These difficulties indicate that though Frederick could influence matters in individual territories, larger shifts in imperial politics depended on factors beyond his control. This became obvious in the four years following George II's proposal in 1748 to make the young Archduke Joseph king of the Romans, or successor designate to Emperor Francis I.⁹⁸ Britain rallied support by offering subsidies that were accepted by Bavaria, Cologne and Wolfenbüttel in 1750. Frederick assumed the stance he had adopted in the imperial election of 1741-42 by breaking ranks with his fellow electors declaring that the issue should come before the Reichstag where he hoped to find support amongst the princes.⁹⁹ Some of his potential allies did sign bilateral friendship treaties, but refused to be drawn into a more formal

⁹⁵ HSAS, A202 Bü.2255 12 Jan.1739.

⁹⁶ The unit totalled 1.400 men and was disbanded in 1747. See HSAS, A202 Bü.2298 12 Feb.1743.

⁹⁷ H. Gerspacher: Die badische Politik im Siebenjährigen Kriege, Heidelberg 1934.

⁹⁸ J. Black: The British attempt to preserve the peace in Europe 1748-1755, in: H. Duchhardt (ed.): Zwischenstaatliche Friedenswahrung in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit, Köln 1991, 227-243; D.B. Horn: The origins of the proposed election of a king of the Romans 1748-1750, in: English Historical Review 42 (1927), 361-370, and his The cabinet controversy over subsidy treaties in times of peace 1749-1750, in: ibid. 45 (1930), 463-466; R. Browning: The Duke of Newcastle and the imperial election plan 1749-1754, in: Journal of British Studies 7 (1967/68), 28-47, and his The British orientation of Austrian foreign policy 1749-1754, in: Central European History 1 (1968), 299-323.

⁹⁹ Moser: Neues Teutsches Staatsrecht (FN 25), II, 702-704. For the British subsidies see C.W. Eldon: England's subsidy policy towards the continent during the Seven Years War, Philadelphia 1938; Schmid: Max III. Joseph (FN 28), 238-254.

alliance with Prussia along the lines of the defunct *Fürstenunion*.¹⁰⁰ Frederick was at a disadvantage since he remained broker, not paymaster because he refused to offer the subsidies the princes needed to play a more prominent role. The renewed interest of the major powers in imperial politics created opportunities to strike better bargains and several princes exploited the situation, using contacts with Prussia as a way to forge closer ties to France that was prepared to pay cash and promise political support for their ambitions. Frederick agreed to cooperate with France on 2 January 1751 to mobilise support against the king of the Romans project. Cologne and Wolfenbüttel defected from Britain, joining Zweibrücken, Bayreuth and the Palatinate in signing agreements with France in 1751. Württemberg had already opened contact with France by 1748 when Karl Eugen joined his two younger brothers in Paris for an extended visit, leading to a bilateral treaty in 1752.¹⁰¹ Negotiations with Hessen-Kassel fell through, but France had managed to sign up Bavaria as well by 1755.¹⁰²

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Frederick had achieved his objective, but only thanks to French assistance. The true extent of his influence in the Empire was exposed by the reversal of alliances in 1756 that saw Britain and France exchange their previous alliance partners. Frederick's brother-in-law, Duke Karl I of Wolfenbüttel, helped broker the Convention of Westminster in 1756 by which Frederick agreed to protect Hanover in the event of war. France meanwhile moved in the opposite direction, forging an alliance with Austria during 1756 that helped precipitate the Seven Years War.¹⁰³ The British alliance drew Prussia closer to the north German Protestant principalities with which it already had dynastic ties, notably Wolfenbüttel, but also Hessen-Kassel and Gotha, since these all had subsidy treaties with Britain. They were better placed to offer the protection Frederick sought for his scattered western provinces, though this proved ineffective when the French actually invaded in 1757.¹⁰⁴ However, as the foregoing has shown, there was nothing 'natural' about such a grouping, since Frederick had sought influence across the Empire since 1740 and had established ties to important Swabian and Franconian territories. These connections were ruptured as France backed Austria, leaving the southern princes little choice but to follow suit and break with Prussia.

¹⁰⁰ Treaties between Württemberg and Bayreuth, 16 June 1749, and Württemberg and the Palatinate, 28 Aug. 1749, both in LBS, cod.hist. fol.647.

¹⁰¹ Anon.: Was einzelne teutsche Fürstenhäuser innerhalb der zwanzig Jahre von 1750-1770 an französischen Subsidien und Geschenken gezogen, in: Neues Göttingisches Historisches Magazin 3 (1794), 324-340; O.C. Ebbecke: Frankreichs Politik gegenüber dem deutschen Reiche in den Jahren 1748-1756, Freiburg i. Br. 1931, 45-71; M. Olbrich: Die Politik des Kurfürsten Karl Theodor von der Pfalz zwischen den Kriegen, 1748-1756, Bonn 1956, 95-122; Pelizeaus: Aufstieg (FN 42), 168-177; Wilson: War, state and society (FN 53), 201-207.

¹⁰² Pelizeaus: Aufstieg (FN 42), 365-375; Schmid: Max III. Joseph (FN 28), 311-348.

¹⁰³ L. Schilling: Kaunitz und das Renversement des alliances, Berlin 1994; E. Buddrus: Die Französische Deutschlandspolitik 1756-1789, Mainz 1995; S. Externbrink: Friedrich der Große, Maria Theresia und das Alte Reich. Deutschlandpolitik und Diplomatie Frankreichs im Siebenjährigen Krieg, Berlin 2006. For Wolfenbüttel's role, see R. Lodge: Great Britain and Prussia in the eighteenth century, Oxford 1923, 83-84.

¹⁰⁴ H. Carl: Okkupation und Regionalismus. Die preußischen Westprovinzen im Siebenjährigen Krieg, Mainz 1993.

Conclusions

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There was a wide discrepancy between what Frederick wrote about the Empire and how he actually dealt with it. His extensive writings need to be treated with care, since they were intended to present him as an Enlightened monarch ruling an independent state equal to any power in Europe. Such a position was indeed incompatible with membership of the feudal hierarchy constituting the Empire. Yet, the Empire remained essential to Prussian security since it offered protection for its Westphalian territories and contributed large numbers of recruits. Above all, as long as the Empire survived, other powers were denied access to the potentially rich resources tied up in its web of overlapping jurisdictions and corporate rights. Prussia had to remain part of this structure if it was to preserve it and prevent other powers manipulating it to their advantage. The Empire thus remained at the heart of Frederick's strategic thinking, since its internal equilibrium helped sustain the wider European balance of power.

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He embraced it out of necessity, not affection. He had no love of the constitution and never took the time to learn how it worked, leaving the details to his officials in the foreign ministry. Though he mocked imperial institutions, he came to appreciate their value in legitimising Prussian policy and as a framework through which he could rally support to block Habsburg measures. He regarded many of the princes with contempt, yet devoted considerable time and energy in dealing with them, becoming personally involved in the minutia of dynastic ambition and court intrigue. Despite his assiduous promotion of Prussia as the match of any European monarchy, the Hohenzollerns remained embedded in the world of the small German courts with the house of Wolfenbüttel as their primary dynastic partner. Other traces of traditional imperial political culture persisted in his outlook and methods. His concern to present his actions as in conformity with imperial law was not entirely cynical, since he took his personal reputation extremely seriously. The theme of Habsburg 'despotism' was a standard part of the political language, as was the use of a princely alliance to oppose it. The notoriety of Frederick's initial invasion of Silesia belies his general avoidance of violence. His attack on Saxony in 1756 also broke the public peace, but otherwise force was applied only once conflicts had already started. Prussia did not annex or occupy other territories during his reign, nor did it threaten to do so. Individual Prussian officers frequently broke the law as they sought recruits or pursued deserters, but Frederick generally refrained from blatant infringement of accepted norms, concentrating instead on dynastic diplomacy to strengthen Hohenzollern claims to other territories. Indeed, there is little to distinguish the methods of Prussian imperial politics from those of other powers like Austria, France, or Russia that also cultivated their clientele amongst the princes and their advisors.

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These methods brought considerable success. Frederick soon learned that he could not play fast and

loose with established institutions like the Kreise or the ecclesiastical principalities. The more cautious approach adopted after 1743 was more time-consuming since it entailed laborious negotiations with individual princes and drew Prussia into their internal affairs. This brought mixed results, since much depended on the inclinations of individual princes and how far Frederick was able to help them. Mecklenburg's experience indicated the dangers of inviting Prussian assistance, while even his Franconian relations had misgivings about supporting him. Occasionally, Frederick met his match as with Maria Augusta during 1742-44 who played on his desire to win support for his *Fürstenunion* to recover her own influence in Württemberg politics. The collapse of Wittelsbach imperial rule also counts as a failure for Prussia since Frederick had hoped Charles VII would have done his job for him by sustaining the Empire as a viable, yet weak non-aligned power in the heart of Europe. Nonetheless, he proved far more successful than his father in obtaining soldiers from the German princes to expand the Prussian army. The concessions Frederick wrung from Charles VII greatly enhanced Prussia's privileged position within the imperial constitution and went a long way towards securing the parity with Austria that he desired. Though the *Fürstenunion* collapsed, Frederick's network of dynastic alliances extended his reach across the Empire and provided sufficient support after 1745 to prevent Francis I recovering the influence enjoyed by former Habsburg emperors.

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The reversal of alliances in 1755-57 demonstrates the limits of Frederick's imperial policy, exposing how far his influence in Germany had depended on French benevolence. Exposure to the full force of the Franco-Austrian alliance during the Seven Years War merely reinforced his existing attitudes to the Empire. Supported by both France and Sweden, the two guarantors of the constitution, the emperor had been able to mobilise the Empire against him. After 1763 Frederick increasingly accepted the Habsburgs choice of the Empire as the political arena. His policy of opposing them by presenting himself as the better guarantor of constitutional propriety led ultimately to the formation of the *Fürstenbund* in 1785.

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