



*Royal Heirs in Imperial Germany:
The Future of Monarchy in
Nineteenth-Century Bavaria, Saxony
and Württemberg*

Frank Lorenz Müller

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Royal Heirs in Imperial Germany: The Future of Monarchy in Nineteenth-Century Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg. By Frank Lorenz Müller. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. ISBN 978-1-137-55126-9. xii +257 pp. £56.99.

Despite the widely held image of a Prussian dominated German Empire from 1871—when the Prussian King, Wilhelm I, was proclaimed amid much pomp and ceremony German Kaiser in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles—the Reich was comprised of a federation of twenty-two monarchical states. Frank Lorenz Müller's compelling book explores a much less appreciated facet of Imperial Germany: namely, the royal heirs predestined to inherit the crowns of the Reich's three smaller kingdoms, Ludwig of Bavaria, Wilhelm of Württemberg, and Friedrich August of Saxony. By examining the lives, functions, and experiences of the individuals who became the last kings of Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg, Müller's absorbing study contemplates what the future of Germany's monarchical system might have been had its ruling houses not been abruptly cast aside. Providing an alternative to the top level approach more commonly adopted in royal academic works, this publication takes as its focal point the future monarchs to three out of Germany's four kingdoms, and provides a new scholarly perspective by concentrating on the period when they were heirs: from the mid 1860s until their respective accessions to the throne.

As the author of the eminently readable biography of Imperial Germany's fourth and final royal heir to a kingdom, Frederick William of Prussia (*Our Fritz: Emperor Frederick III and the Political Culture of Imperial Germany*, 2011), Müller is well placed to make use of the vast range of material that exists across Germany's state archives, illustrating the attitudes held by members of the German aristocracy and courts, as well as the major, and lesser known, political figures of the day. As a native German, Müller is able to successfully utilise the vast source material, specifically the reports of the contemporary popular press concerning the activities and functions of the royal heirs of Imperial Germany.

Müller begins the second chapter by weighing in persuasively on the problems of royal succession, which in the European ruling houses of the late nineteenth century passed from father to son, and in most cases was a seamless transition. Yet, as Müller demonstrates, the problems encountered by the royal heirs who did not hold the title Crown Prince emphasises this deviation from a smooth transfer of monarchical authority, which caused considerable embarrassment to the ruling house. Secondly, Müller identifies the tensions between a royal heir's private religious commitments and how they were perceived in the public domain, an issue that confronted the

staunchly Catholic Friedrich August, who was future monarch to an almost entirely Protestant Saxony. Finally, the third section—which will appeal to general readers with its compelling accounts of royal marriages, scandals, and tragedies—focuses on the domestic home life of the heirs to the thrones of Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg. When all the evidence is weighed, it seems that under Ludwig, Wilhelm, and Frederick August these ruling houses were able to adapt and respond to these potential crises by effectively communicating with their future royal subjects, and as Müller concludes, demonstrating that their monarchies were evolving institutions.

In chapter three Müller provides a fascinating account of how the three princes, in accordance with their varying talents and dynastic traditions, emphasised their fitness for their predestined roles. Here, Müller examines in detail the issue of educating heirs to the throne in what had arguably become a highly public facet of royal life and the military and parliamentary spheres of state in which Ludwig, Wilhelm, and Frederick August would have to demonstrate their ability as the future constitutional rulers of Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg. Despite the disdain that the future king of Württemberg held towards his duties as a soldier, Wilhelm recognised the importance of communicating his military credentials to his future subjects, and understood that military prowess was a kingly virtue that justified, for many, the existence of the hereditary system.

The next section of Müller's book shifts the discussion to the narratives generated by the royal heirs in their respective kingdoms, and the issue of individual sovereignty in response to the demand for supremacy from the newly founded Reich under the Prussian-German emperor. Chapter four outlines how this emotional bond, in all three of the Reich's smaller kingdoms, was forged between each ruling house and their Bavarian, Saxon, and Württemberg subjects. Here, focusing on family-oriented celebrations such as wedding anniversaries, birthdays, and dynastic events including the founding of the royal house, enabled the royal heirs to place themselves within the broader narratives of their respective ruling houses, and commemorated and projected an image of dynastic duty to their royal subjects as well as emphasising collective identities. The significance of this approach is confirmed in chapter five, which analyses the different experiences that confronted the future successors to the sub-national monarchies of Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg, alongside their future destiny as individual sovereigns in the German Reich. Here Müller shifts the discussion from the narrower focus of regional identities to the growing strength of an all-German national identity, formed by its architect, Otto von Bismarck, and ruled over by the sometimes tactless Kaiser Wilhelm II.

After exploring the problems and challenges that confronted the three successors, the bond forged with their respective regions, and the issue of particularism, Müller's final chapter examines the three different styles of constitutional monarchy that Wilhelm, Ludwig, and Friedrich August envisioned for their kingdoms. Müller argues that Friedrich August's popular but non-political image of a loving father and family man, reinforced by cultural patronage across his realm, pointed to a new type of middle class monarch who would continue the Saxon dynasty's gradual detachment from active politics. Müller goes on to analyse the future monarchical role envisioned by the assertive and outspoken Ludwig of Bavaria, who in contrast to his royal counterpart in Dresden "anticipated the end of the regency through the prospect of a restored, modernised and energetic monarchical role more in tune with parliamentary majorities and popular opinion" (216). The final chapter shows how, as each of the three future kings anticipated their eventual accession, their concept of constitutional kingship varied, from Dresden, Munich, and Stuttgart.

This book offers an alternative view of Germany's multiple monarchies to the Kaiser-centric approach that is often adopted by historians. Versatile in its approach and filled with vivid biographical anecdotes of the three heirs of Imperial Germany, this book confirms the importance of this area for further academic study. It also invites comparative research into the remaining heirs and sovereigns of Imperial Germany's lesser-known ruling houses.

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