

CALVIN'S CROWN: THE REFORMED FAITH AND THE RISE OF THE HOHENZOLLERNS

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The conversion of the Hohenzollern family to Calvinism stands as an under-examined yet crucial turning-point in the history of the Prussian state, as it changed the very essence of the Hohenzollerns and the development of absolutism, with the roots of Brandenburg-Prussia's unusual condition being found in the religious conflict between Lutherans and Calvinists throughout the duchy. The Kingdom of Prussia has been held as the example of absolute monarchy *par excellence* by such leading German historians as Fritz Stern and Christopher Clark.¹ There was likely no other state in eighteenth century Europe where the control of the state over the people and the centralization of power was more complete.² Yet, despite this realization, German historians have also long recognized that the rise of Prussia was as unlikely as it was sudden. There were few states in seventeenth century Europe where the monarchy was as weak and the central administration so divided.³ The general literature regarding the unique and rapid rise of Prussia tends to fall into two different schools. The first is a Marxist-materialist thesis that focuses on the relationship between the Hohenzollerns, the *Junker* and the peasantry, and how the three classes competed with each other in the creation of the Prussian state.⁴ The second is a bellicist answer that seeks to tie together the military structure and war fighting capabilities as Prussia was formed into

¹ Stern strongly emphasizes this in his book *Gold and Iron: Bismarck, Bleichröder, and the Building of the German Empire* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

² Mary Fulbrook, *Piety and Politics: Religion and the Rise of Absolutism in England, Württemberg, and Prussia* (Cambridge, Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 53.

³ Philip S. Gorski. *The Disciplinary Revolution: Calvinism and the Rise of the State in Early Modern Europe*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 79.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

a kingdom.⁵ The ‘Borussian’⁶ interpretation of Prussian history, best seen in the writings of Heinrich von Treitschke, will not be discussed in this paper, as it offers a teleological view of Prussian inevitable hegemony that has been harshly criticized by many other historians to its teleological conclusions that Prussia’s hand in German unification was inevitable.⁷

This work does not acknowledge that either the bellicist or materialist theory provide an adequate explanation of why Prussia developed so differently from the surrounding states of the Holy Roman Empire, which shared with Prussia many of the same political, geographical and economic features. Instead, this thesis will focus on the Calvinist religion of the Hohenzollerns and examine the vital role that it played in developing Prussian absolutism through centralizing power away from the Lutheran nobility.

Francis L. Carsten originally advanced his materialist theory regarding the rise of Prussia absolutism in his work *The Origins of Prussia*. Carsten focuses his argument around the reign of the “Great Elector,” Friedrich Wilhelm, and the negotiations that were made between the Duke and his attending *Junker* nobles.⁸ Particular attention is paid to the *Landtags-Rezesse*, a series of agreements made between Friedrich Wilhelm and the *Landtag*, territorial estates of Brandenburg-Prussia and the newly acquired territory of Cleves-Mark in the Rhineland.⁹ Carsten presents the relationship between the Duke of Brandenburg-Prussia and the nobility as a sort of symbiotic relationship, built on the backs of the helpless peasantry. An ‘enduring alliance’ was forged between Friedrich Wilhelm and the *Junker*: the nobles would give the Duke greater authority over taxation, which would enable the ducal family to build up an army for proper defense and enforce greater control over the government, while in return, the Hohenzollerns would give the *Junker* free reign over their peasantry.¹⁰ This would allow the nobility to enforce what Carsten calls the ‘second serfdom’ over their subjects and make massive profits in selling grain to the Western markets.¹¹ After removing the Dutch influence in his Rhenish provinces of Cleves and Mark through an alliance

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Taken from the Latin word for Prussia.

⁷ It does not help Treitschke’s reputation that his attacks on German Jews were later enthusiastically adopted by the NSDAP several decades later. G. A. Craig’s edition of Treitschke’s *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975) is an excellent resource for those wishing to learn more about this particular theory.

⁸ F. L. Carsten, *The Origins of Prussia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 182.

⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰ Ibid., 182.

¹¹ Ibid.

with the House of Orange in 1655, Friedrich Wilhelm used the nobility and standing army to extract 300,000 *reichsthaler* from them.¹² Having the financial capital now to build up his power base, says Carsten, the Elector then proceeded to build up a professional army and centralize authority around Berlin.¹³ Friedrich Wilhelm then consolidated his position by striking bargains with the Brandenburg landed nobility in 1653 and integrating them into “princely patronage networks,” which proved a more effective means of securing funding and advancing absolute rule.¹⁴ Hans Rosenberg concurs with Carsten’s thesis, stating that the relationship between the Elector and the noble bureaucracy was one of mutual assistance, in order to better strengthen each other’s position in the state.¹⁵ After an abortive first attempt to separate the bureaucratic nobility from the landowners in what Rosenberg terms a “divide-and-rule technique,” Friedrich Wilhelm instead turned to a more successful policy of cooperation between the Elector and nobles.¹⁶

As influential as the materialist theory has been in crafting historical perspectives of Brandenburg-Prussia, it runs into trouble when one examines the evidence. Carsten and Rosenberg’s central claim, that Prussian absolutism arose out of a close alliance between the Elector and the nobility, is built upon a foundation that lacks evidence. The use of the words ‘alliance’ and ‘pact’ by Carsten implies a close relationship built upon good will and harmony, where in reality, there were not any sort of ties on that level until the reign of Friedrich the Great nearly a century later.¹⁷ Without any sort of the benevolence exhibited by Friedrich Wilhelm’s great-grandson, the only partnership between the Elector and the *Junker* could have been founded on shared interests. Carsten’s case is just as weak in this instance as well, however, because there is very little evidence of cooperation between Duke Friedrich Wilhelm and the nobility during his reign.¹⁸ The *Junker* landowners would have appreciated assistance from the Elector and his army in putting down troublesome serf rebellions, but Friedrich Wilhelm and his successors were often less than

¹² F. L. Carsten, “The States General and the Estates of Cleves about the middle of the seventeenth century”, *Essays in German History*” (London, 1985), 83.

¹³ Carsten, *The Origins of Prussia*, 178-183.

¹⁴ Peter H. Wilson, *German Armies: War and German Politics, 1648- 1806* (London: UCL Press, 1998), 32.

¹⁵ Hans Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy, and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience, 1660-1815* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 44-46.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁷ Linda Frey and Marsha Frey, *Frederick I: The Man and His Times* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 166.

¹⁸ Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution*, 80, 112.

forthcoming with the regulars.¹⁹ A potential reason for the Great Elector's hesitation in committing his troops was that he was motivated in keeping his valuable and expensive army as unbloodied as possible. This was especially true during the Thirty Years War, where the standing army was the only line of defense between Brandenburg-Prussia and complete devastation. Instead, the Duke and his descendants frequently intervened to protect the serfs from the rapacious actions of their landlords, although Phillip Gorski suggests that this was motivated more by practicality than kindness, as Friedrich Wilhelm understood that a strong state could only stand on the shoulders of a prosperous and hardworking lower class.²⁰

In contrast to the materialists, the bellicist theorists start their argument on the foundation that the relation between the Crown and the estates was at its basest nature an antagonistic one.²¹ The name of the bellicist theory comes from the link that proponents attempt to draw between the creation of the military and the rise of absolute rule in Brandenburg-Prussia.²² Gordon A. Craig makes a case for this in *Politics of the Prussian Army*, where he speaks of the central role that the military had in the coalescence of Prussia into a unified kingdom under an absolute monarchy. Craig's theory is that geopolitical pressure rather than the economic transformation of the materialists is to account for the rise of Prussian militarism, that the need for a strong army for defense and expansion was the main driving force behind the initial centralization of Brandenburg-Prussia under the Great Elector and eventually the rest of Germany as well.²³ The *Kriegskommissare*, Friedrich Wilhelm's war commissioners, were appointed to bear the standard of the Elector's authority to the provincial *Oberkriegskommissare* and, through them, the *Generalkriegskommissare* in Berlin.²⁴ It was due to the natural outgrowth of the increasing costs of the military establishment over the century that led to the high degree of absolute rule and centralization under the Kings of Prussia.²⁵ Craig's model of Brandenburg-Prussia is that it arose from a typical middling-sized state in the Holy Roman Empire after the Peace of Westphalia, thus making it possible to view it as a representation of Germany as a whole.²⁶ The trouble with this assumption is that unless

¹⁹ Fulbrook, *Piety and Politics*, 49.

²⁰ Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution*, 80.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

²² *Ibid.*, 80.

²³ Gordon A. Craig, *Politics of The Prussian Army 1640-1945*. ([S.l.] Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1955), 33.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁵ Craig, *Politics of The Prussian Army*, 14-15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

there is evidence that Brandenburg-Prussia had a great deal more geopolitical pressure on it than any of the dozen or so other like-sized German principalities, the rise of Prussian absolutism could not have been brought about by the influence of military considerations alone.²⁷

Of course, it is important to acknowledge that Brandenburg-Prussia during the early seventeenth century was completely surrounded by states with various degrees of intent to harm the duchy and acquire its territory. The Kingdom of Sweden across the Baltic Sea was salivating at the opportunity to seize the Duchy of Pomerania, with the valuable port of Stettin at the mouth of the Oder River.²⁸ The Kingdom of Poland to the east was still the sovereign lord of the Duke of Prussia, a fact that Friedrich Wilhelm was reminded of when he had to travel to Warsaw to swear fealty to the King in order to inherit the duchy upon his ascension to the electorate.²⁹ Brandenburg's western provinces were even more exposed to interference from France and the United Provinces, which required constant political maneuverings by the Great Elector to keep them under Hohenzollern control.³⁰ "On one hand," wrote Friedrich Wilhelm during the early years of his reign, "I have the King of Sweden, on the other the Kaiser: here I stand between the two awaiting that which they will do unto me – whether they will leave me mine own, or whether they will take it away."³¹ It would be correct to say that the administrative actions of the Great Elector were largely in response to these looming threats on Brandenburg-Prussia's borders, but where Craig's bellicist theory falls through is his failure to explain why the Hohenzollerns reacted so differently than the other German princes in very similar predicaments. The peculiar political reasoning and rationality of Friedrich Wilhelm remains unfathomed, because Brandenburg-Prussia has been pigeonholed by the incorrect assumption that it and its dynasty were on the whole, typical of the other principalities of the *Reich*. The only way to fully explore why the Margraviate arose out of the Holy Roman Empire is to take close note of the one thing that set it apart completely from every other principality its size, making it very atypical indeed: its ruling family,

²⁷ Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution*, 84.

²⁸ Ferdinand Schevill, *The Great Elector* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1947), 125.

²⁹ Leopold Von Ranke, *Memoirs of the House of Brandenburg and History of Prussia during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Volume I*, trans. Sir Alexander D. Gordon and Lady Gordon (London: John Murray, 1849), 46.

³⁰ Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution*, 84.

³¹ *Bedenken, ob ich eine Partei jetzt oder ins künftige nehmen soll* (Considerations as to whether I should make a resolve now or at a future date). Original Document in the Elector's own hand in the Royal Archives in Berlin. Ranke, *Memoirs of the House of Brandenburg*, 38.

the Hohenzollerns, was Calvinists.

In reviewing the sources, it can be seen that historians generally come to an agreement that the introduction of Calvinism to Brandenburg-Prussia through the conversion of Johann Sigismund was a political watershed for the duchy. The question lies in whether or not this new particular sect of Protestantism changed the course of Prussian history through the actions of Friedrich Wilhelm.

To start with, the Duchy of Brandenburg was not a principality of any note in the early days of the Holy Roman Empire. Friedrich, an unknown nobleman hailing from the small castle of Hohenzollern in the wilds of Swabia, received the title of Elector of Brandenburg from the hand of Sigismund, Holy Roman Emperor, in 1410.³² At this time in history, Brandenburg was little more than a small principality with poor arable land and no access to the sea, barely able to defend itself against even the most minor of threats. The subsequent Electors of Brandenburg carefully guided their precariously placed duchy through the turmoil of the Protestant Reformation; Elector Joachim II only cautiously embraced Lutheranism in 1555 to avoid excessively alienating the bellicose Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.³³ Elector Johann Sigismund inherited the Duchy of Prussia and took communion as a Calvinist in 1609, as Reformed values and principles began to flood the ducal court from the Netherlands and Rhineland.³⁴ His son, Friedrich Wilhelm, popularly known as “The Great Elector,” took control of the duchy in 1640, and through the unusual autonomy of government established by the conflict between the Lutheran estates and the Calvinist Duke and administration, set up the creation of the Kingdom of Prussia, later achieved under his successor, Friedrich I, King in Prussia.³⁵ The seven different territories of the duchy, ranging from Cleve and Mark in the west to Prussia and Pomerania in the east, had their own sets of governmental institutions and political precepts.³⁶ In order to bring these disparate duchies together under the centralized rule of the Elector, the Hohenzollerns had to make a considerable shift in their dealings with the noble rulers of the provincial estates. By 1570, the

³² Thomas Carlyle, *History of Friedrich II of Prussia, Called Frederick the Great*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1894), 135-36.

³³ Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany. The Reformation*. (New York: Knopf, 1970), 223.

³⁴ Christopher M. Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 115.

³⁵ Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany. The Reformation*, 359.

³⁶ Otto Hintze, "Calvinism and Raison D'état in Early Seventeenth Century Brandenburg," in *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze*, ed. Felix Gilbert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 153, 79.

Brandenburg-Prussian landowners had complete control over their land and could withhold financial and military support from Berlin at any time.³⁷ The tax collection agencies of the Elector were largely in the hands of the corporate nobility, so the authorities would often diplomatically ignore when noble landowners purposefully understated their taxable landholdings and income.³⁸

This situation was due in part to the actions of Elector Joachim II at the meeting of the *Landtag*, or diet.³⁹ Joachim II, burdened by crushing debts as a result of Brandenburg's lack of arable land, came to this meeting of the landed nobility with the request that they relieve him of his debt.⁴⁰ After concluding his plea for assistance, and having to listen to some rather cutting criticism of his poor financial management and careless handling of the budget, the estates agreed to take over the Elector's debts on very harsh terms.⁴¹ The nobles insisted on personally collecting the taxes for which they voted and satisfying the debts they assumed, as well as creating a financial administration called the *Creditwerk*, cutting Joachim II and his descendants almost entirely out of the public finances.⁴² The consequences of Joachim II's actions converted the former warrior caste of Brandenburger knights into money-minded landlords in absolute control of their land and serfs. This change in the status of the classes was effectively completed by the change of title that came into general use at this time. Formerly known to the law as *Ritter* (knights), these men of the *Landtag* were henceforth known to all as *Junker*, as landed gentlemen, broadly equivalent to noblemen of other European states.⁴³ In order to drag Brandenburg-Prussia out of this decentralized mess, the Great Elector Friedrich Wilhelm utilized the innate loyalty of fellow Calvinist nobles to undermine the authority held by the largely Lutheran landowners, stripping them of their political power. Brandenburg-Prussia's unusual path to absolute rule, centralization and its subsequent rise to power cannot be understood outside of the context of its religious situation under the Hohenzollerns.

To understand the effect that Calvinism had on House of Hohenzollern, it is necessary to first examine the doctrine of the faith itself. The Reformed Faith, more commonly known as Calvinism after the prominent French reformer John Calvin, began to coalesce in March of

³⁷ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 90.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁹ Reigned 1535-1571; and Schevill, *The Great Elector*, 92.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Schevill, *The Great Elector*, 94.

1536, with the publication of Calvin's first and greatest work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.⁴⁴ First published in Latin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* laid out Calvin's foundation of the Christian faith, as well as ferociously attacking the Catholic Church. "There [in Rome], instead of the ministry of the word, prevails a perverted government, compounded of lies, a government which partly extinguishes, partly suppresses, the pure light."⁴⁵ The central assertion of Calvin's work is that God is able to save every person on Earth upon whom He has chosen to show mercy, and His efforts towards such salvation are not frustrated by mortal action or inaction.⁴⁶

The Five Points of Calvinism, recorded at the Synod of Dort in 1619, over fifty years after Calvin's death, function as a basic guide to Reformed Doctrine.⁴⁷ The first canon, "Total Depravity," is taken from Augustine's writings on the fallen nature of man and states that as a consequence of Original Sin, no man is able to choose to serve God willingly and be saved because his very humanity compels him against it.⁴⁸ The second canon, "Unconditional Election," states that God has 'elected' from eternity those who He wishes to extend divine mercy to through the sacrifice of Christ alone. The unfortunates that are not chosen to be among the elect are justly punished under reprobation.⁴⁹ "Limited Atonement," the third canon, states that Christ's atonement on the cross, while sufficient for all, is only efficient for the elect. The fourth canon, "Irresistible Grace," states that God's desire to show mercy for the elect is more powerful than the draw of human nature to commit sin, therefore bringing the elect to God with divine certainty. The final point, "Perseverance of the Saints," states that because God's grace and will are not able to be resisted by men, then those called to the elect will never fall away from God. Those that do apparently seem to fall away have done so because they lacked true faith.⁵⁰

Just like Luther before him, Calvin's teaching sent shockwaves rippling through Northern Europe. For centuries, the Roman Catholic Church had promised salvation to those who faithfully submitted to

⁴⁴ John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 119.

⁴⁵ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), 641.

⁴⁶ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 23.

⁴⁷ MacNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism*, 264.

⁴⁸ R. L. Dabney, "The Five Points of Calvinism," The Spurgeon Archive, 2001, <http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/dabney/5points.htm> (accessed February 02, 2012).

⁴⁹ Dabney, "The Five Points of Calvinism."

⁵⁰ Ibid.

church-appointed authority and followed the holy sacraments. In one fell swoop, the Protestant Reformation had suddenly removed that comforting guarantee. In the absence of a priest's assurances, the Protestants, particularly the followers of Calvin, began to look for more material signs that they were to be saved.⁵¹ The inability of a Calvinist to control his own fate was solved by simply believing that one has been chosen for salvation, as self-doubt and wavering was a sure sign of the reprobate. As self-confidence became a measure of salvation, worldly success began to be more associated with assurance of membership in the elect. Max Weber theorized that the true fulfillment of the 'Protestant Work Ethic' is found in Calvinism. Lutherans, and to an extent, Pietists, are "too concerned with the reception of divine spirit in the soul" and suffer from a pronounced passivity held over from their strongly Catholic heritage.⁵² The lack of paralyzing asceticism that is found in Pietist congregations also galvanizes Calvinists to stir to greater heights of economic and political power.⁵³ Calvinism serves as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy, in which the elect seek to demonstrate their membership in the population of the saved by their earthly works and deeds. Hard work and frugality are considered to be key signs of one's membership in the elect.

Ironically, despite many similarities in Calvin's and Luther's theological teachings, the relationship between the two Protestant camps turned contentious. Lutherans differ from Calvinists in their respective interpretations of human will. The Calvinist doctrine of predestination to both salvation and damnation, a canon known as 'double-predestination,' was repugnant to the Lutheran church.⁵⁴ Luther's teachings hold that only election to salvation is unconditional and predestined, with there being no foreordination of damnation to sinners. Lutherans also hold that the conversion of a sinner to a Christian is made through the means of grace, and is resistible according to the wills of the individual.⁵⁵ This contrasts with the Calvinist teaching that the Holy Spirit irresistibly calls the sinner to Christ. Calvinists also disagree with Lutherans on the preservation of

⁵¹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950), 98.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 35-36.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁵⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1955), 43-50. "Observe how pleasantly and kindly God delivers you from this horrible trial with which Satan besets people today in strange ways in order to make them doubtful and uncertain, and eventually even to alienate them from the Word. 'For why should you hear the Gospel,' they say, "since everything depends on predestination?" In this way he robs us of the predestination guaranteed through the Son of God and the sacraments."

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

the saints and potential apostasy. Calvinists believe that the elect will eternally persevere in Christ in faith and holiness until the end of time, despite all trials. Lutherans hold that falling away from Christ is possible, and can only be prevented through deep introspective and contemplation on one's personal faith.⁵⁶

These differences between Lutheranism and Calvinism also translate into different motivations for those that adhere to each selection of teachings. Where the Calvinist is inspired by his membership in an elect which strives ahead to prove himself, the Lutheran is more passive in his spiritual and temporal nature, and seeks introspection and assurances through the church clergy of his salvation through both faith and works.

The introduction of Calvinism into Prussia began with the Great Elector's grandfather, Johann Sigismund Hohenzollern, Prince-Elector of the Margraviate of Brandenburg and Duke of *Ostpreußen*. Influenced by the Rhenish Calvinist courtiers attending his father, Joachim Friedrich, it is thought, first came to embrace the Reformed Faith on a trip to Heidelberg in 1606, the capital of the Palatinate and a major center of early seventeenth century German Calvinism.⁵⁷ His conversion conveniently furthered the dynastic interests of the Hohenzollerns in the Rhineland, where the support of the Calvinist Dutch was vital.⁵⁸ The legitimacy of the Hohenzollern dynasty in their newly acquired Rhenish provinces was at stake, and required the security provided by the Dutch United Provinces to prevent other more proximate nobles from scooping them into their own demesne. This greater involvement of the Brandenburg ducal family abroad was largely brought about as a result of Johann Sigismund's marriage to Anna, daughter and heiress of the infirm Duke Albrecht Friedrich of Prussia and Marie Eleanore, sister of the duchess of Jülich-Cleves. This union strengthened the Hohenzollerns' inheritance rights in Prussia and provided the basis for their dynastic claims in the Rhineland, bordering the rapidly growing economic powerhouse of the Dutch Netherlands.⁵⁹ Even better for the Hohenzollerns, the current rulers of both the duchies of Prussia and Cleves had no direct descendants, and therefore Johann Sigismund found himself in a well-established position to

⁵⁶ Lyle W. Lange, *God so Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 2005), 448.

⁵⁷ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 115.

⁵⁸ Bodo Nischan, "Calvinism, the Thirty Years' War, and the Beginning of Absolutism in Brandenburg: The Political Thought of John Bergius," *Central European History* 15, no. 03 (1982): 203.

⁵⁹ Andrew Pettegree, A. C. Duke, and Gillian Lewis, *Calvinism in Europe, 1540-1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 184.

assert his ducal claims to both.⁶⁰

Regardless of his political motivation and geographical desires, on Christmas Day 1613 Sigismund took communion “according to the Calvinist rite” in Berlin, officially converting away from Lutheranism to the Calvinist faith.⁶¹ Despite this action, the vast majority of his subjects remained staunch Lutherans, including his iron-willed wife Anna of Prussia, who would fling dinner plates and glasses at her husband’s head during arguments.⁶² When the Elector and his predominately Calvinist court attempted to enact a plan under the Holy Roman Empire’s principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*,⁶³ the popular, and undoubtedly spousal, resistance was far stronger than he had anticipated.

On the 30th of March, 1615, the Margrave of Berlin, Johann Sigismund’s brother, ordered the removal of the altars, baptismal font, crucifixes and sundry artworks from the Berlin Cathedral in the name of removing all ‘idoltrous images’ and liturgical paraphernalia. The virulent rhetoric from the pulpit only caused tensions to rise further. The Calvinist court preacher, Martin Füssel, exacerbated the situation by using his Palm Sunday sermon a few days later to thank God “for cleaning His house of worship of the dirt of popish idolatry.” The nearby Lutheran congregation of St. Peter’s was then roused to a fury by their deacon who shouted from the pulpit that “the Calvinists call our place of worship a whorehouse . . . they strip our churches of pictures and now wish to tear the Lord Jesus Christ from us as well!” That evening, an assembly of over one hundred Berliners met to swear that they would “strangle the Reformed priests and all other Calvinists.”⁶⁴ Faced with a full-blown revolt, and the Lutheran landed nobility threatening to withhold their tax revenues from the state, the hapless Johann was forced to permanently suspend all attempts at forcibly bringing Brandenburg-Prussia together under one religion.⁶⁵

Despite this abortive attempt in 1615 which created a definitive divide in Brandenburg between the predominately Calvinist royal family and their Lutheran vassals, the Reformed faith continued to spread throughout the duchy of Brandenburg-Prussia because of its political benefits, especially amongst the nobility more closely aligned with Berlin. The Electors and later, the Kings of Brandenburg-Prussia heavily depended on the support of the Reformed Church in creating political

⁶⁰ Ibid., 184.

⁶¹ Nischan, “Calvinism, the Thirty Years’ War,” 203.

⁶² Ibid., 76.

⁶³ “Whose realm, his religion,” a principle agreed to by Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, in the Peace of Augsburg, 1555.

⁶⁴ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 117.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 118.

legitimacy for their rule.⁶⁶ In Johann Sigismund's conversion to Calvinism, he aligned the Hohenzollern line with the politically progressive forces of the Reformed Dutch against the conservative Lutheran estates of the Prussian *Junker* and the reactionary Catholic Habsburgs abroad.⁶⁷ Otto Hintze stressed the interaction between the faith of the Hohenzollerns and their subsequent political decisions, saying that Calvinism formed the bridge by which western European styles of governance and centralization made its entry in Brandenburg.⁶⁸ Although the bridge to absolute rule may have been created by Johann Sigismund, the duchy of Brandenburg-Prussia was able to cross it into the annals of history under the rule of his grandson, Prince-Elector Friedrich Wilhelm.

Friedrich Wilhelm was born in the ducal castle in Berlin on February 16, 1620.⁶⁹ The already precarious political situation of Brandenburg-Prussia had been made significantly more perilous by the recent outbreak of the Thirty Years War, which threatened to ravage Northern Germany and destroy the independence and freedom of religion that the Reformation had created. After Johann Sigismund's conversion to Calvinism, Brandenburg-Prussia had been increasingly isolated from its traditional Lutheran allies, such as Saxony and Mecklenburg, obliging Elector George Wilhelm to seek political and economic support from other Reformed rulers throughout Europe.⁷⁰ Of these, the Palatine of the Rhine was the most significant German Calvinist state, an elector of the Holy Roman Empire on an equal level with Brandenburg and Saxony.⁷¹ Friedrich Wilhelm's father, George Wilhelm, was married to the daughter of the Elector Friedrich IV of the Palatine, whose mother in turn was a member of the most vigorous family of the Calvinist faith in Europe, being the daughter of William, Stadtholder of the United Provinces.⁷² Thus,

⁶⁶ Angela Strauss, "Pluralism in Heaven: Religion in the Prussian Military of the 18th Century," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Law and Politics* 39 (February 2011): 59.

⁶⁷ Johann Gustav Droysen, *Geschichte Der Preussischen Politik*, Bodo Nischan, trans. (Leipzig: Veit & Comp., 1868), 2/2:436.

⁶⁸ Hintze, "Calvinism and Raison D'état," 153.

⁶⁹ Schevill, *The Great Elector*, 78. Contemporary sources place the date of the Great Elector on February 6th. In 1620, Brandenburg and most of Protestant Germany were still employing the Julian calendar, which was ten days behind the reformed Gregorian calendar, sponsored by Pope Gregory XIII (1572-1585).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁷¹ *Frederick III, Elector Palatine*, Frederic P. Miller, Agnes F. Vandome, and John McBrewster, eds. (Saarbrücken: VDM Publishing House, 2010).

⁷² That is, William the Silent, founder of House Orange-Nassau, first Stadtholder of the United Provinces and leader of the Dutch Revolt against the Habsburgs. See Geoffrey Parker, *The Thirty Years' War* (London: Routledge, 1997), 23.

even before Friedrich had taken his first breath, he was already directly related to the Reformed Powers of Europe through the houses of Brandenburg, Orange and the Palatine.⁷³

Before Friedrich Wilhelm had reached his sixth birthday, he was evacuated from Berlin to the castle of Cüstrin on the Oder River to escape the war's surge into the vicinity of Brandenburg. His guardian, from about 1625 to 1635, was a staunchly Calvinist and well-educated nobleman named Leuchtmar, hailing from the Hohenzollern's recently acquired Rhineland provinces.⁷⁴ Leuchtmar would be Friedrich Wilhelm's inseparable companion for most of his teenage years, including during a journey made to the Netherlands that made an indelible impression on the young prince. It was the custom in Europe at this time to send young scions of notable families to university upon reaching the age of fourteen, and the Hohenzollerns were no exception to this. Deciding against sending Friedrich to a German house of learning due to the level of tumultuous upheaval gripping the Holy Roman Empire, and probably at the insistence of his son's Rhenish mother and Dutch grandmother, his father George Wilhelm sent Friedrich to the University of Leiden near The Hague.⁷⁵

The influence of the Reformed Dutch can be seen in the changes created in Brandenburg-Prussia. In the decades that followed the battle of Nieuwpoort in 1600, where a combined Anglo-Dutch army under Maurice of Nassau decisively defeated an invading Spanish army, dozens of princes, nobles and military made the journey to Holland to observe the Dutch government and military in action.⁷⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm was sent by his father, Elector George Wilhelm to the United Province to learn as much as he could from the Dutch systems of commerce and war.⁷⁷ He spent his adolescence in the Netherlands, studying at the University at Leiden while frequenting the military camps of Prince Maurice of Orange and the bustling docks of Rotterdam in his spare time.⁷⁸ Friedrich Wilhelm stayed in the Netherlands from fourteen to his eighteenth birthday.⁷⁹ When he returned to Potsdam, eventually to assume his father's position, he strongly fortified the Calvinist presence of the Hohenzollerns in Brandenburg by establishing stronger ties with the Dutch

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Schevill, *The Great Elector*, 79.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 81.

⁷⁶ Hintze, "Calvinism and Raison D'état," 73.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*, Brigitta Oestreich and H. G. Koenigsberger, eds., David McLintock, eds. (Cambridge, Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 120-21.

⁷⁹ Schevill, *The Great Elector*, 82.

Republic through diplomacy and marriage.

When Friedrich Wilhelm ascended to the title of Duke and Elector in 1640 at the age of twenty, the only Calvinist institutions in Brandenburg-Prussia were the ducal court, the cathedral in Berlin, and the University of Frankfurt an der Oder, which had been a stronghold of Reformed thought since 1610.⁸⁰ Lutheranism remained the dominant faith of the majority of the Brandenburger population, as it had since Brandenburg's relatively late conversion in 1525.⁸¹ The tension between Reformed Christians and Lutherans in Brandenburg was exacerbated by the large migration of Calvinists fleeing persecution from France and other Western European countries. Atrocities such as the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572 and Parma's occupation of Maastricht in 1579 were widely circulated in Northern Germany by Protestant publishers to generate international support for the struggle against the Roman Catholic Church.⁸² Pamphlets graphically depicting the crimes committed by the Spanish and the French served as grim reminders to Calvinists that they occupied a very precarious position in Europe.⁸³ Three weeks after Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in October 1685, Friedrich Wilhelm issued the Potsdam Decree, offering any French religious refugees safe and free political asylum in Hohenzollern lands.⁸⁴ This decree served a double purpose behind an expression of religious tolerance, for Friedrich Wilhelm actively sought to increase the number of his Calvinist subjects by encouraging more immigrants. Since most of the more wealthy Huguenots would have preferred to settle in the more clement climes of the Netherlands or England, the savvy Elector offered numerous inducements to make Brandenburg a more appealing destination, such as tax breaks, limited self-government, and separate judicial systems for Reformed communities, often paying for such benefits out of the ducal treasury. More than one-third of the Brandenburg-Prussian state budget of 1686 was allocated to subsidies designed to attract more Calvinists from Holland, France, Switzerland, Piedmont and the Palatinate to populate the lands still deserted nearly thirty years after the Peace of Westphalia.⁸⁵

The Thirty Years War began as a clash within the Holy Roman Empire between Protestant and Roman Catholic servants of the *Kaiser* and could not be brought entirely to a close without the resolution of the issues

⁸⁰ Richard L. Gawthrop, *Pietism and the Making of Eighteenth-Century Prussia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 9.

⁸¹ Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany: The Reformation*, 183.

⁸² Pettegree, *Calvinism in Europe*, 190.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Carsten, *The Origins of Prussia*, 268.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 269.

that birthed it. Ever since the days of Martin Luther and the Reformation, the leading Protestant prince in the Holy Roman Empire had been the elector of Saxony, whose leadership amongst the other Lutheran and Calvinist states had continued to assert itself throughout the Thirty Years War.⁸⁶ This leadership however, was fast crumbling by the Peace of Westphalia under the elector in Leipzig, Johann George, who identified himself solely with Lutheranism and was bitterly antagonistic towards both Calvinists and Catholics alike. Of the Reformed German principalities represented at Westphalia, Friedrich Wilhelm of Brandenburg was the foremost, making it a main facet of his own program to win for himself and his fellow Calvinists in the Holy Roman Empire the full legal recognition and equality on par with Lutheranism to which they considered themselves entitled.⁸⁷ Holding that both Calvinist and Lutherans were equally true faiths, Friedrich Wilhelm declared that the Confession of Augsburg⁸⁸ contained nothing to which the Reformed Church did not itself believe, and that therefore the religious peace of 1555 that granted tolerance to the Lutherans thus automatically included the Calvinists as well.⁸⁹ Due to Friedrich Wilhelm's advocacy and fearless resolution in the face of bitter Lutheran opposition, Article VII of the Treaty of Osnabrück declared the Reformed faith protected under the Augsburg Confession.⁹⁰ This victory at the peace table was a smashing success for Brandenburg's prestige on the European stage, as well as a helpful boost for her reputation with the other Calvinist powers of Europe. The foremost amongst these fellow Reformed states was the United Provinces, ruled by the House of Orange, whom the Great Elector strove to become diplomatically aligned with through marriage.

After Friedrich Wilhelm's attempted betrothal to Princess Christina of Sweden went up in smoke due to animosity between the Scandinavian power and Brandenburg over Pomerania, he set his sights on a more attainable bride. Therefore he looked to the leading Calvinist house of Europe, the House of Orange, to whose dynasty's founder Friedrich was himself related to.⁹¹ Friedrich Wilhelm's marriage on December 3rd, 1646 to the devoutly Reformed Luise Henriette of Orange, granddaughter of William the Silent and Princess of the Palatinate, in conjunction with his many highly trusted Dutch-educated advisors served

⁸⁶ Schevill, *The Great Elector*, 126.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 126-27.

⁸⁸ A summary of the Lutheran faith laid before Emperor Charles V and ratified on June 25, 1530.

⁸⁹ Schevill, *The Great Elector*, 127.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

to further cement the connection between the Hohenzollerns and the other Calvinists of Europe, especially the Dutch.⁹² This connection to the House of Orange brought him many courtiers traveling from Amsterdam and The Hague, the most important of whom were Reformed preachers educated in the United Provinces.

During Friedrich Wilhelm's reign, the institutional strength of the Brandenburg-Prussian Reformed Church was increased through the distribution of Calvinist chaplains, known as *Hofprediger*, to staff local parishes and train teachers of Reformed schools.⁹³ These preachers tended at first to be mostly from the Rhineland and the Netherlands, although more native-born Brandenburger stock would soon follow.⁹⁴ To put a stop to the incendiary and divisive sermons launched from both Calvinist and Lutheran pulpits, Friedrich Wilhelm mandated religious toleration. In 1664, he issued a ducal warning to all ministers, Lutheran and Calvinist, to cease their vitriolic attacks on each other during sermons and other public speeches or else risk losing their appointments and parishes, a religious move with subtle political undertones.⁹⁵ Through this decree, Friedrich extended the control that the Elector personally had over the churches of Brandenburg, increasing his legitimacy in the eyes of the nobility. To further control the Lutheran nobility, who at times made no secret of their distaste for the Calvinist Hohenzollern, the Elector strictly limited their political power, centralizing taxation control and replaced them in the administration with handpicked Calvinist courtiers.⁹⁶

Through these actions and acquisition of new territories under Friedrich Wilhelm, Brandenburg-Prussia moved into ever higher levels of the political stage. The Hohenzollern territories were widely dispersed over Northern Europe, and devoid of any unifying ties save those of the dynastic link, which was new, lacking in legitimacy, and thus still fragile.⁹⁷ Everywhere the estates under the Lutheran nobility had strong political influence and could easily leave the state defenseless by choosing to withhold their support.⁹⁸ The court at Berlin, unable to protect their far-flung lands from invasions from outside or unrest from within, had to be reformed in order to better serve the Elector and establish control over the widely-spread Hohenzollern domain. Friedrich Wilhelm realized that he needed to enforce his will over his renegade estate nobles as quickly as

⁹² Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*, 122.

⁹³ Gawthrop, *Pietism and the Making of Eighteenth-Century Prussia*, 45.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Frey and Frey, *Frederick I*, 21.

⁹⁶ Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution*, 87-90.

⁹⁷ Holburn, *A History of Modern Germany: 1648-1840*, 53.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

possible through the most efficient means. This conflict which kept the Elector's hands tied was rooted in the religious enmity between Lutheran nobles and the Calvinist court.

Striving to centralize control at the ducal court, and already engaged in diplomatic skirmishes with the Kingdom of Sweden regarding the Duchy of Pomerania on his northern frontier, Friedrich Wilhelm set out for his western provinces of Cleves-Mark to try to shore up his support amongst the nobility there.⁹⁹ The vast majority of nobility in Cleves-Mark were Calvinist, a by-product of their close proximity to the Reformed stronghold of the Dutch Netherlands, and Friedrich Wilhelm was able to work out a compromise with them.¹⁰⁰ The Calvinist nobles agreed to contribute some funds to the state coffers, and in return, Friedrich Wilhelm restored their noble privileges of tax exemption and special market rights.¹⁰¹ To further cement his support in the region, as soon as the deal was concluded the Duke promptly ordered the Catholic nobles in his Rhineland provinces to be arrested while their property was confiscated and redistributed.¹⁰² After this political stroke, the relationship between Elector Friedrich Wilhelm and the Hohenzollern estates in Cleves-Mark became much more financially stable. Between 1655 and 1660, the Cleves-Mark nobility contributed over 1.5 million *Reichsthaler* and 20,000 men to the Elector's military campaign on the Baltic.¹⁰³ In exchange, Friedrich gave the estates considerable rights and privileges of their own, including the right to collect and adjust taxes.¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, Friedrich did not attempt to overplay his hand in his outlying provinces by forcibly centralizing them under him by appointing officials from his own court over them, but instead chose to allow them a substantial degree of self-determinacy instead of curtailing them sharply as he did in the east.¹⁰⁵ Absolute control from Berlin would have been very difficult, especially with Hanover and Westphalia separating Cleves-Mark from the central seat of power in Brandenburg-Prussia, and a more *laissez-faire* approach in handling his nobility in this region was much more logical. Friedrich also did not need to place his own court officials in positions of power in Cleves-Mark, as the nobility and their subjects were already loyal to him, and Calvinist.

⁹⁹ Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 29.

¹⁰⁰ Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*, 120.

¹⁰¹ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 55.

¹⁰² Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution*, 91.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 94.

A similar treatment can be seen in the actions of Friedrich Wilhelm regarding Halberstadt and Magdeburg, two small bishoprics in modern Saxony-Anhalt that fell under Hohenzollern dominion after the conclusion of the Peace of Westphalia.¹⁰⁶ After the Thirty Years War, Brandenburg had gained over 24,000 km² of territory, including the bishopric of Minden in Westphalia and the twin bishoprics of Halberstadt and Magdeburg.¹⁰⁷ Just like Cleves-Mark, the majority of both Magdeburg's and Halberstadt's populations were Calvinist, with a proportionally higher ratio of burghers and bustling centers of commerce.¹⁰⁸ In a strikingly similar turn of events, Friedrich Wilhelm allowed the nobles of the bishoprics to retain their tradition rights and privileges, despite the relatively close proximity of both territories to the ducal court at Berlin, and the ease of centralization which it implied.¹⁰⁹

The bulk of Brandenburg territorial gains after the Peace of Westphalia fell within the region of the Upper Saxon *Kreis*, or 'Circle' along the Baltic Coast, where Eastern Pomerania was added to the Hohenzollern demesne.¹¹⁰ Political difficulties with Sweden and disagreements regarding the division of the province led to *Hinterpommern*, the easterly half of the province, coming under the rule of Brandenburg-Prussia while the westerly *Vorpommern*, with the crucial port of Stettin at the mouth of the Oder River, fell to the Swedes.¹¹¹ The religious conflict is clearly demonstrated by the situation in the duchies of East Pomerania and East Prussia, where the nobility of the local estates remained staunchly Lutheran.¹¹² Here, just as the Duke had done in Brandenburg, the nobility was marginalized politically during the 1660s and 1670s through the same process. Although the Luther Junker were permitting to retain their ancestral estates, the power that they once had over the purse strings of state was removed.¹¹³ The religious conflict and growing tension between the Calvinists and Lutherans was soothed by an increased centralization of power in Berlin and appointment of loyal Calvinist officials in the provincial administrations.¹¹⁴ The relationships between the Elector and the nobility varied significantly from one province

¹⁰⁶ Holburn, *A History of Modern Germany: 1648-1840*, 14-19.

¹⁰⁷ Wilson, *German Armies*, 21.

¹⁰⁸ Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution*, 90.

¹⁰⁹ Berlin is 149 km from Magdeburg & 214 km from Halberstadt along the modern A2. Cleves is 589 km away.

¹¹⁰ Wilson, *German Armies*, 21.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Nischan, "Calvinism, the Thirty Years' War," 203-04.

¹¹³ Holburn, *A History of Modern Germany: The Reformation*, 183.

¹¹⁴ Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution*, 90.

of Brandenburg-Prussia to the other, as did the corresponding level of the absolute power of the Duke and the degree of centralization. These variations however, are not due to apparent tension between classes, geopolitical situation or the setup of the local administrations. What is most evident from these examples is that Friedrich Wilhelm tailored his policy towards each particular province by utilizing the religious conflict between Lutherans and Calvinists. By using the loyalty of his Calvinist subjects and spreading his court's influence through the Reformed Faith, the Great Elector was able to undermine the decentralizing influence of the Lutheran nobility across Brandenburg-Prussia, pulling them closer to Berlin and strengthening the absolute power of the central government.

From the first decade of the seventeenth century, the authority of the Elector was centered in the *Geheimer Rat für die Kurmark*, the Privy Council for the Electoral Mark, a chamber of notables close to the Duke. Although the *Rat* was originally meant to only serve the Margraviate of Brandenburg, as the Hohenzollern demesne grew, Prussia and Cleve-Mark slowly fell under its sway as well.¹¹⁵ With the territorial additions recently added to Brandenburg-Prussia by the Peace of Westphalia, Friedrich Wilhelm felt the need to reorganize the entire *Geheimer Rat* in such a way as to raise it up to the level of a proper central government organization for all of his new territories.¹¹⁶ The vast majority of the *Geheimer Rat* was made up of Calvinists, and Friedrich Wilhelm used this religious loyalty to its maximum potential.¹¹⁷ On December 4, 1651, the Elector published an ordinance at Cleve to turn the *Rat* into a full ministry of the government, although not entirely like the ministry that we in the modern world would expect, with individual ministers assigned to defense, diplomatic affairs, agriculture, et cetera. Brandenburg-Prussia in the mid-seventeenth century was far too feudal in nature and the masters of the estates were adamant against being consolidated, willing to resist by any means possible.¹¹⁸ Friedrich Wilhelm realized this, and cannily allowed each province to retain its local government headed by a *Statthalter*, but a councilor would also be assigned from the *Geheimer Rat* as well; one to Brandenburg, another to Prussia, another to Pomerania, and so on through the Hohenzollern possessions down to the smallest bishopric.¹¹⁹ This provincial councilor would serve in Berlin, acting as the representative of his assigned region and serving as part of a system that subordinated all the individual diverse territories of Brandenburg as areas subjected by a

¹¹⁵ Ranke, *Memoirs of the House of Brandenburg*, 33.

¹¹⁶ Schevill, *The Great Elector*, 144-45.

¹¹⁷ Ranke, *Memoirs of the House of Brandenburg*, 33.

¹¹⁸ Schevill, *The Great Elector*, 144-45.

¹¹⁹ Ranke, *Memoirs of the House of Brandenburg*, 48-52

Calvinist council to their Calvinist Ruler.¹²⁰ While more effective political fusion of the Hohenzollern demesne in a proper kingdom only came about in the future, it doubtlessly received a powerful start from the act of 1651, by which the *Geheimer Rat* of Brandenburg was appointed to serve as the central governing organization for the dominions of the Elector.

The increasingly centralized power of the Elector in Brandenburg- Prussia through his administrative and diplomatic actions cannot be readily explained from either the purely economic materialist or the solely militaristic bellicist perspectives. As expected, the relationships between Friedrich Wilhelm and his estate nobility varied considerably from province to province as did the degree of relative administration centralization, from the highly restricted provinces of Prussia and Pomerania to the more lax rule over Cleve-Mark and Magdeburg. These variations of rule, however, do not appear to be solely related to either the class structure or geopolitical considerations of the province before the Great Elector began his reforms. Both of these conditions did play a part in the rise of the Prussian monarchy, but the role of religion is one that has often been understated by the majority of historians. The religious tension between Calvinists and Lutherans stemming from the 1609 conversion of Johann Sigismund played a crucial role in the rise of the Hohenzollern dynasty. Without the influence and assistance of other Reformed houses in Europe, his own personal court of Calvinist councilors, and the mindset and upbringing of his religion, Friedrich Wilhelm simply could not have brought the different provinces of his demesne under his control in any sort of adequate way. Without the religious pressure brought about by his careful appointments of church officials and limitation of the political powers of the nobility, the legitimacy of his rule would have been challenged. The influence of the Reformed Houses of the Palatinate and Orange played a larger role in Brandenburger politics than any other state in the Holy Roman Empire, which further bolstered the legitimacy of the Hohenzollern Electors. Brandenburg-Prussia in the seventeenth century was an atypical principality, and with its Calvinist ruling family and the superb leadership of Elector Friedrich Wilhelm, began an unusually autonomous state within the Holy Roman Empire, with a predilection towards absolute monarchy.

¹²⁰ Schevill, *The Great Elector*, 145.