

War, state and society in Württemberg, 1677–1793

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Introduction

This book is about the interrelationship between war, society and political ambition in absolutist state-building in the German south-west. It focuses on the duchy of Württemberg as a case study to test existing theories on the development of states and to provide an insight into the structure of the Holy Roman Empire (*Reich*).

The first three chapters approach these issues thematically and comparatively. The following five examine the Württemberg experience between 1677 and 1793. Though these dates mark the accession and death of particular Württemberg dukes, they also coincide with the major historical shifts that form the parameters of this study. The first is when the move towards absolutism began in earnest in both Württemberg and many other smaller German territories. The second saw the onset of the French Revolutionary Wars and the progressive collapse of the Reich. The ground rules governing the political actions of the participants in this story were irrevocably altered and a new set of circumstances was introduced under which future German state development was to take place.

In testing the validity of the theories of motive forces behind state development, Württemberg is of particular interest as it is smaller than the states normally chosen as examples of the two most widely accepted theories. It is also the prime example for the recent theory advanced specifically to explain the development of the smaller states.

The older of these two theories puts forward the 'primary of foreign policy' (*Primat der Aussenpolitik*) as the driving force behind the development of the state.¹ In order to defend itself against foreign aggression and compete with other states, the emergent modern state had to develop a larger, centrally ruled and administered territory sufficient to maintain an adequate level of constant military preparedness. This link between military and state organisation is now widely accepted by historians, especially those in Germany, as a truism. A state without military power is considered 'an absurdity' and 'especially the modern state as it developed, in the absolutist epoch', is seen to have been largely – if not wholly – determined by its

¹ O. Hintze, 'Military organisation and the organisation of the state' and 'The formation of states and constitutional development', both in F. Gilbert (ed.), *The historical essays of Otto Hintze* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 157–77, 180–215. See also G. Oestreich, 'Zur Heeresverfassung der deutschen Territorien vom 1500 bis 1800', in R. Dietrich and G. Oestreich (eds.), *Forschungen zu Staat und Verfassung. Festgabe für Fritz Hartung* (Berlin, 1958), pp. 419–39.

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military organisation.² Absolute monarchy is regarded as synonymous with a standing army.³

The second theory sees the drive towards a well-ordered state (*eine gute Polizei*) as being responsible for the development of the modern state. According to this theory, the need to control those elements of the population considered dangerous to the ruling elites prompted the state to develop a bureaucratic apparatus to regulate all aspects of society and the economy.

Within the literature on both theories there is a debate over the respective weight to be assigned to the role of impersonal forces, often defined in Marxist socio-economic terms, and that of the individual. The emphasis on the latter heightens the role played by individual rulers and sees their personal characteristics as instrumental in shaping wider events. The former sees individual actions as largely predetermined by the underlying socio-economic structure. In its classic, Marxist, form, this tendency views the creation of absolutism as the product of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The monarch is seen as essentially part of the nobility, who either emancipates himself from their control by a temporary alliance with the 'bourgeoisie' (Western model), or collaborates with them, gaining the nobles' support for centralisation by extending their control over the peasantry (Eastern model).⁴

A more watered-down version eschews such class analysis, but still sees state-building as essentially a group rather than an individual activity. These groups, often rather imprecisely termed 'elites', helped push forward state development through their interaction, either in conflict, or collaboration, with the ruler. The two most important elite groups were the bureaucrats and the estates, or leading notables who were nominally the representatives of the entire population and who sat in an assembly with varying powers over policy-making and taxation.

A recent example of this concept is Marc Raeff's idea of an inner dynamism of the bureaucracy. This is said to have propelled it to assume ever more functions as a result of the decline and withdrawal of the church and the consequent movement of the secular power into the vacuum. The projects for all kinds of reforms and improvements, along with the tendency towards ever-increasing supervision and regulations associated with German cameralism, seems to provide evidence for this view.⁵ Though sometimes overstated, it does have the advantage that it

² H. Schmidt, 'Staat und Armee im Zeitalter des "miles perpetuus"', in J. Kunisch and B. Stollberg-Rillinger (eds.), *Staatsverfassung und Herresverfassung in der europäischen Geschichte der frühen Neuzeit (Historische Forschungen, 28, Berlin, 1986)*, pp. 213–48 at p. 214; also G. Best, *War and society in revolutionary Europe, 1770–1870* (London, 1982), p. 8.

³ J. Childs, *Armies and warfare in Europe 1648–1789* (Manchester, 1982), p. 28.

⁴ P. Anderson, *Lineages of the absolutist state* (London, 1974); A. Dorpalen, *German history in Marxist perspective. The East German approach* (London, 1985), pp. 138–67.

⁵ M. Raeff, *The well-ordered police state. Social and institutional change through law in the Germanies and Russia 1600–1800* (New Haven/London, 1983); C. W. Ingrao, *The Hessian mercenary state. Ideas, institutions and reform under Frederick II 1760–1785* (Cambridge, 1987), esp. pp. 23–37.

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takes account of the influence of ideas such as mercantilism and enlightenment philosophy in policy-making.

Often the two main theories are linked together with the standing army being regarded as 'a coercive policy instrument used in internal affairs as well as in wars against foreign opponents'.⁶ Indeed, the link is already inherent in the theory of the primacy of foreign policy. The 'pushing and pressing' of states against each other forced each state to seek appropriate military organisation and consequently to shape its internal structure. Those forces within the state that opposed this development, such as territorial estates, had to be crushed or, at least, coerced into co-operating, otherwise the state would be unable to compete with its rivals and so risk losing its independence.⁷

Again, this is seen as being especially true of the absolutist era, or, as the Marxists prefer it, 'the late feudal epoch'. Some go so far as to mirror Eckart Kehr's work on Wilhelmine Germany and transform the concept of primacy of foreign policy into one of domestic policy.⁸ The domestic security considerations of the ruling elites thus become the primary factor behind bureaucratic centralisation and military development. Dangerous social elements could be intimidated by the new standing armies. The supposedly high proportion of 'foreign mercenaries' in these armies is taken as proof of their deployment as instruments of social control used by an absolutist ruler to suppress his own subjects. Potential opposition from traditional elites could be avoided by integrating them into the officer corps and so making them a part of the absolutist state's system of control. These elites were thus given a role that both enabled them to maintain their material position and compensated them for their loss of political independence. The standing army also served to protect their control of the means of production from attacks by the lower orders.⁹ This has been seen as being particularly true of those lands east of the river Elbe, especially Prussia,¹⁰ and has led Marxist historians to characterise 'the standing army as the pillar of feudal reaction'.¹¹

The Thirty Years War (1618–48) is regarded as providing a major impetus for these developments. The brutality of the conflict left a deep imprint on the German

⁶ Childs, *Armies and warfare*, p. 27.

⁷ Hintze, 'Military organisation'.

⁸ E. Kehr, *Der Primat der Innenpolitik: gesammelte Aufsätze zur preussisch-deutschen sozialgeschichte im 19 und 20 Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1970).

⁹ H. Schnitter and T. Schmidt, *Absolutismus und Heer* (Berlin, DDR, 1987); H. Schnitter, 'Zur Funktion und Stellung des Heeres im feudalabsolutistischen Militarismus im Brandenburg-Preussen', *Zeitschrift für Militärgeschichte*, 10 (1971), 306–14; V. G. Kiernan, 'Foreign mercenaries and absolute monarchy', *Past and Present*, 11 (1957), 66–86.

¹⁰ The most cogent and balanced example of this argument is O. Büsch, *Militärsystem und Sozialleben im alten Preussen 1713–1807. Die Anfänge der sozialen Militärisierung der preussisch-deutschen Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1962).

¹¹ O. Rocholl, 'Das stehende Heer als Stütze der feudalen Reaktion. Ein Beitrag zur Heeresgeschichte vornehmlich des 17. Jahrhunderts', *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Karl-Marx-Universität Leipzig. Gesellschafts- und staatswissenschaftliche Reihe*, 1, 9/10 (1952/53), 499–510.

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consciousness, heightening both the desire for strong government and the fear of future conflict. This was especially the case among the smaller states which, like Württemberg, had been powerless to prevent their territory becoming a common battlefield.

The lesson of the war was clear: 'A poor state was a victim state.'¹² Only a ruler who could establish firm fiscal control and maximum exploitation of available resources could survive and increase his power. The way forward appeared to be to prolong the emergency situation created by the war and make it the basis of government. Those, like the Prussian Hohenzollerns, who managed to do this were able to bypass their estates and were well on the way to establishing absolutism by 1700. However, the war had left many princes heavily in debt and compelled them to grant further concessions to their estates in return for financial assistance. The resumption of prolonged warfare in the 1670s following the aggression of Louis XIV and the Turks gave these princes a second chance. One such ruler was the duke of Württemberg and the degree to which he was able to exploit these circumstances to introduce absolutism will be the subject of Chapters 4 and 5.

If the importance of war in the creation of absolutism has long been recognised, the exact nature of the link is still the matter of some debate. Followers of Michael Roberts' thesis of a 'Military Revolution' see late seventeenth-century absolutism as the product of military change taking place between 1560 and 1660. Changes in weaponry and tactics resulted in armies becoming not only larger but more expensive. To cope with these changes, rulers were forced to reform and expand their administrations, resulting in a drive to absolutism. Recently, this theory has been stood on its head by Jeremy Black, who correctly points out that the major increase in army size occurred in the last third of the seventeenth century, after absolutism had been introduced in many major European states. This increase, he argues, was the product, not the cause, of absolutism and resulted from the greater degree of internal political stability which absolutism had created.¹³

With regard to both views, it is worth remembering that the connection between absolutism and military growth was never uniform, nor inevitable. Often, military needs proved so pressing that princes were compelled to contract out to private 'military enterprisers' who carried out organisational tasks in the absence of permanent state employees.¹⁴ Though the state clawed back these functions

¹² M. Hughes, *Early modern Germany 1477–1806* (London, 1992), p. 102.

¹³ M. Roberts, 'The military revolution 1560–1660', in his *Essays in Swedish history* (London, 1967), pp. 195–225; G. Parker, 'The military revolution 1560–1660 – a myth?', *Journal of Modern History*, 47 (1976), 195–314 and his *The military revolution. Military innovation and the rise of the west 1500–1800* (Cambridge, 1988); J. Black, *A military revolution? Military change and European society 1550–1800* (London, 1991).

¹⁴ F. Redlich, *The German military enterpriser and his workforce. A study in European economic and social history* (2 vols., Wiesbaden, 1964–5).

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whenever it could, the creation of a large fiscal and military bureaucracy did not automatically enhance princely control. Fiscal pressures frequently forced a ruler to tolerate, or even encourage, the growth of a venal bureaucracy through the sale of public office. In any case, the incumbents of such posts often developed a will of their own and professional ethos that was sometimes at odds with princely policy. Moreover, the constant need for money strengthened the influence of the estates and other institutions whose approval was necessary for taxation. If anything, war hindered as much as encouraged the development of absolutism. Württemberg provides a good example of this, as the discussion of the relative position of the estates and bureaucracy in Chapter 2 will show.

Partly because these theories of state development appear to fit so well within the situation identified in Prussia and partly because of that state's later role as leader of a united Germany, there has been a tendency to use Prussian examples as the basis of generalisations for the rest of Germany. P. G. M. Dickson's recent work now provides an excellent analysis of the relationship of fiscal and military policy to bureaucratic change in Austria. However, there is a noticeable lack of such investigations for the smaller states.¹⁵ The military creations of the small German princes are still generally dismissed as 'playing with soldiers' (*Soldatenspielerei*). Their main function is seen as a source of revenue for their despotic – enlightened or otherwise – creators. Alongside Hessen-Kassel, Württemberg is regarded as the prime example of this 'soldier trade' (*Soldatenhandel*).¹⁶

This view of the military establishments of the small states appears to support the third and most recent theory on the driving force behind state-building. This is the idea of 'cultural competition', which was first advanced by James Allen Vann in connection with Württemberg and has recently been linked to Hessen-Kassel.¹⁷ 'Unable even to contemplate cutting a dash on the international stage' owing to the inadequacy of their resources, the rulers of such states are said to have found an outlet for their desire for prestige in attempting to establish their territories as 'the most cultured in the Holy Roman Empire'.¹⁸

Like the primacy of foreign policy, the idea of cultural competition identifies the desire for money as the driving force behind the state-building of the absolutist

¹⁵ P. G. M. Dickson, *Finance and government under Maria Theresia 1740–1780* (2 vols., Oxford, 1987). For a rare attempt to assess these issues in a small German state, see H. Caspary, *Staat, Finanzen, Wirtschaft und Heerwesen im Hochstift Bamberg (1672–1693)* (Bamberg, 1976).

¹⁶ For example: 'Perhaps the epitome of small standing armies, excessive military expenditure and militaristic absolutism is to be found in the history of the Duchy of Württemberg during the eighteenth century': Childs, *Armies and warfare*, p. 35. The literature on the *Soldatenhandel* is discussed on pp. 74–7 below.

¹⁷ J. A. Vann, *The making of a state. Württemberg 1593–1793* (Ithaca/London, 1984). Vann's theory of cultural competition has not found a favourable reception among German historians; see the reviews of his book by B. Wunder, *ZWLG*, 45 (1986), 393–6; and H. M. Maurer, *ibid.*, 47 (1988), 511–12; Ingrao, *Hessian mercenary state*.

¹⁸ Review of Ingrao's work by T. C. W. Blanning in *German History. The Journal of the German History Society*, 6 (1988), 191–2.

monarchs. The difference between the two theories is the motive for demanding the money. The former maintains it was required for military competition – the latter, as its name indicates, for cultural competition. This implies that the rulers of the small states placed the buildup of their prestige above the achievement of their political aims. The evidence advanced in Vann's book seems to suggest that Württemberg was indeed a classic example that supports this theory. The court was always dazzling and often at the forefront of contemporary culture. The high point appears to be reached under Duke Carl Eugen (1737/44–93) who is universally depicted as having used the money he obtained from foreign subsidy treaties to finance his 'cultural competition' rather than raise the troops he was supposed to provide.

The nature of these treaties and their role in princely policy is the subject of Chapter 3. As Dickson points out, one of the major problems in evaluating their importance is that 'little is known about the use made of subsidies once they were received'.¹⁹ With few rare exceptions,²⁰ no one has bothered to work out what the German princes really spent the money on. Chapters 5, 6 and 8 attempt to do this for Württemberg, the most notorious case throughout the secondary literature for the most blatant misuse of subsidies.

Money, for whatever purpose, was certainly a cause of prince–estate conflict. Württemberg internal relations from the 1670s to the 1790s were dominated by the dispute between duke and estates over fiscal control. However, money was not the ultimate object of the battle, but rather the trigger for a wider struggle for power. As Chapter 2 will show, money provided the starting-point, because it represented the means for a prince to achieve his dynastic aims (outlined in Chapter 1). Conversely, control over taxation ensured the continued influence of those socio-economic groups represented in the estates and limited the effects of the duke's more reckless policies which were detrimental to their wider interests.

An analysis of the course of this conflict opens up a further dimension for the issue of state-building. Rulers such as the duke of Württemberg, whose estates had effective control over taxation, had an incentive to reform. These reforms could range from efforts to maximise returns on what sources of income were directly available to attempts to seize immediate control of those that were not. This raises the issue of whether early modern representative institutions acted as a positive or negative force in state development.

The Anglo-Saxon Whiggish tradition sees the estates as assisting positively in the development of their state by defending popular freedoms and sharing in administrative tasks. This is a view which is shared by the older folksy–patriotic Württemberg historians, who portray the estates as fighting an unceasing battle in

¹⁹ Dickson, *Finance and government*, II, pp. 157–8, 183.

²⁰ P. C. Hartmann, *Geld als Instrument europäischer Machtpolitik im Zeitalter des Merkantilismus 1715–1740* (Munich, 1978).

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the duchy's best interests against the actions of arbitrary and irrational dukes.²¹ The wider German literature, on the other hand, tends to see the estates as impediment (*Hemmschuh*) to the 'progressive' centralising tendencies of the monarch.

Regardless of opinion, however, both views have similar implications. Both see state development as the product of prince–estate dualism and not the sole creation of the prince and his bureaucracy. Further, both see this dualism primarily as a conflict relationship, with prince and estates as mutually hostile and a struggle for power as inevitable.

Recently, this interpretation has come under criticism. Prince–estate relations were not automatically hostile but were characterised as much by co-operation as conflict. The perennial complaints of princely transgressions on traditional rights and privileges represent the rhetoric of contemporary political debate and were not in themselves evidence of permanent estrangement of the two parties. Real conflict only arose when the sides could no longer reach a compromise with each other.²²

As the investigation of the long conflict in Württemberg will show, this happened when a threat to the vital interests of one party posed by the policies of the other coincided with the absence of a convergence of general interests. This became progressively more common in Württemberg from the 1670s as the adoption of an alien baroque court culture was followed in 1733 by the rule of a Catholic duke over Lutheran subjects. After the European 'reversal of alliances' in 1756 removed the potential of a French invasion as a common threat, the duke sought to free himself from domestic constraints by ambitious military expansion. The failure of this policy between 1759 and 1765 did not result, as previously believed, in a new spirit of co-operation after the final settlement (*Erbvergleich*) of 1770. Instead, conflict continued, though on a reduced scale because of the diminished possibilities for ambitious ducal policies.

The examination of this conflict, together with ducal efforts to realise long-term dynastic aims, also opens up new perspectives on the position of the smaller German territories within the system of the old Reich. In the past, the presence of these small states was seen by nationalist historians as a hindrance to German unification under Prussian leadership. Keen to champion this unified state, such writers sought to paint the military and political organisations that preceded it in as bad a light as possible. Thus, the political structure of the Reich was portrayed as weak and ineffective and the myriad of small states was criticised as *Kleinstaaterei*.

²¹ F. L. Carsten, *Princes and parliaments in Germany from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century* (Oxford, 1959). For the older Württemberg view, see the works of Karl Pfaff whose influence is to be found in those of A. E. Adam, A. Pfister and many others.

²² J. Gagliardo, *Germany under the old regime 1600–1790* (Harlow, 1991), pp. 101–3. See also the useful discussion of these issues in G. Haug-Moritz, *Württembergischer Ständekonflikt und deutscher Dualismus. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Reichsverbands in der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (VKGLK, Reihe B, vol. 122, Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 5–14.

Though this so-called Borussian legend still persists in some general works, it has been extensively revised in the specialist literature since the 1960s.

Increasingly, the Reich is seen as a flawed but functioning political system which acted relatively effectively to protect its weaker components from the transgressions of the stronger parts. This system is regarded as having operated on a number of levels: national (Reich), regional (*Kreis*), and local (territorial state).²³ The relationship between each level and between all three and the emperor was regulated by the complex system of checks and balances built into the post-1648 imperial constitution. There has been a tendency to ignore the relationship between the various parts of this system in favour of detailed studies of the individual components. The present study is intended to redress this. By studying the course of princely policy at all levels, the relationship of each part to the whole can be better understood.

In particular, it aims to open up the complex matrix of emperor–Kreis–territorial state, and the relationship of the first two to the key components of the latter: duke, estates and bureaucracy. In doing so, I aim to explain why it proved so difficult for small and medium princes such as the dukes of Württemberg to realise their aims as long as the system of the Reich continued to function. This will shed light on the relative effectiveness of various parts of the system and on the ability of the emperor to exploit both the system and the princes' weakness to advance his own aims.

This will involve a reassessment of the relationship of both Württemberg and the emperor to the Swabian Kreis. Apart from the imperial courts,²⁴ much of the recent historiography has focused on the Kreise in general and Swabia in particular. Swabia is widely regarded as having been the best-functioning of all ten Kreise. Its member states are depicted as co-operating effectively to maintain a common defence force, regulate trade and tariffs, stamp out vagrancy and enforce imperial legislation. In Vann's very positive assessment of the period 1648–1715, the Kreis is portrayed as overcoming confessional differences between Protestants and Catholics and working harmoniously with the emperor. Even in Heinz-Günther Borck's investigation of the period its final collapse between 1792 and 1806, the Kreis emerges as a functioning institution, albeit one that was cracking under the strain of immense upheaval.²⁵ Recently, Vann's optimistic view has been toned down by Graf von Neipperg, who argues that the much-vaunted Swabian efficiency was as much a product of discord as accord. Internal divisions, such as those between Württemberg and Constance, Protestants and Catholics, as well as often hostile relations with both the emperor and the nearby Austrian authorities, proved

²³ This system is further explained on pp. 17–23.

²⁴ M. Hughes, *Law and politics in eighteenth-century Germany. The Imperial Aulic Council in the reign of Charles VI* (Woodbridge, 1988).

²⁵ J. A. Vann, *The Swabian Kreis. Institutional growth in the Holy Roman Empire, 1648–1715* (Brussels, 1975); H. G. Borck, *Der schwäbische Reichskreis im Zeitalter der französischen Revolutionskriege (1792–1806)* (VKGLK, Reihe B, vol. 61, Stuttgart, 1970).

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a constant source of conflicts. These produced varying coalitions of disparate forces which tended to balance each other out. This helped as much to maintain an equilibrium as any genuine convergence of interest between the parties.²⁶ The extent to which these findings are borne out and to which they represent in microcosm the workings of the entire Reich will be revealed in the following chapters.

²⁶ R. Graf von Neipperg, *Kaiser und schwäbischer Kreis (1714–1733). Ein Beitrag zu Reichsverfassung, Kreisgeschichte und kaiserlicher Reichspolitik am Anfang des 18 Jahrhunderts (VKGLK, Reihe B, vol. 119, Stuttgart, 1991).*