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10. Crown Prince Frederick
 greets Kette through the window
 of his cell. Engraving by Daniel
 Chodowiecki.

cousin of the Habsburg Empress. Her choice as bride represented a clear victory for the imperial interest over the party that had favoured the English marriage.

Was this episode in Frederick's life a trauma that transformed the prince's personality? He had fainted into the arms of his guards before the moment of Kette's decapitation in Küstrin and remained in a state of extreme terror and mental anguish for some days, partly because he initially believed that his own execution was still imminent. Did the events of 1730 forge a new and artificial persona, acerbic and hard, remote from others, locked within the nautilus shell of a convoluted nature? Or did they merely deepen and confirm a tendency towards self-concealment and dissimulation that was already well developed in the adolescent prince? The question is ultimately unanswerable.

What does seem certain is that the crisis had important implications for the prince's developing conception of foreign policy. The Austrians were closely involved not only in masterminding the collapse of the English marriage, but also in managing the crisis that broke out following Frederick's attempted flight. It is an indication of how deeply imperial and Brandenburg-Prussian court politics were interwoven

during the reign of Frederick William I that the first draft of the document setting out a 'policy' for disciplining and rehabilitating the errant prince was submitted to the king by the imperial envoy, Count Seckendorff. The woman Frederick was ultimately forced to marry was effectively the Austrian candidate. 'If I am forced into marriage with her,' he warned the minister Friedrich Wilhelm von Grumbkow in 1732, 'she will be rejected [elle sera repudiee].'⁷⁹ Frederick would hold to this resolution after his accession in 1740, consigning Elisabeth Christina of Brunswick-Bevern to a twilight existence on the margins of public life.

Austria's imperial tutelage over the Brandenburg-Prussian court was thus both a political and a personal reality for Frederick. The crisis of 1730 and its aftermath amplified the prince's distrust of the Austrians and reinforced his cultural and political attachment to France, Vienna's traditional enemy in the west. Indeed, it was Frederick William's own growing frustration with Austrian policy during the 1730s (to which we shall later return) that opened the door to a fuller reconciliation between father and son.⁸⁰

THE LIMITS OF THE STATE

The Prussian historian Otto Hintze observed in his classic chronicle of the Hohenzollern dynasty that the reign of Frederick William I marked 'the perfection of absolutism'.⁸¹ By this he meant that it was Frederick William who succeeded in neutralizing the power of the provincial and local elites and welding the diverse lands of the Hohenzollern patrimony into the centralized structures of a single state ruled from Berlin. As we have seen, there is something to be said for this view. Frederick William endeavoured to concentrate power in the central administration. He aimed at the subordination of the nobilities through military service, the equalization of tax burdens, the purchase of formerly noble land and the imposition of new provincial administrative bodies answerable to the officials in Berlin. He enhanced the capacity of the administration to intervene in the vicinities of the grain market.

It is important, however, not to assign disproportionate significance to these developments. The 'state', such as it was, remained small. The central administration – including royal officials in the provinces –

counted in total no more than a few hundred men.⁸² A governmental infrastructure had scarcely begun to emerge. Communications between the government and many local communities remained slow and unpredictable. Official documents passed to their destinations through the hands of pastors, vergers, innkeepers and school children who happened by. An investigation of 1760 in the principality of Minden revealed that it took up to ten days for official circulars and other important documents to cover the few kilometres between neighbouring districts. Government communications were often sent in the first instance to taverns, where they were opened, passed around and read out over a glass of brandy, as a result of which they arrived at their ultimate destinations 'so dirtied with grease, butter or tar that one shudders to touch them'.⁸³ The days when an army of trained and disciplined postal and other local officials would penetrate the provincial districts of the Hohenzollern lands were still far in the future.

It was one thing to issue an edict from Berlin and another to implement it in the localities. An instructive case is the Schools Edict of 1717, a famous decree because it has often been seen as inaugurating a regime of universal elementary education in the Hohenzollern lands. This edict was not published in Magdeburg or Halberstadt, because the government agreed to defer to existing school regulations in these territories. Nor was it fully effective in the territories where it was published. In a 'renewed edict' of 1736, Frederick William I complained that 'our salutary [earlier] edict has not been observed', and a thorough survey of the relevant local records suggests that the edicts of 1717 and 1736 may have been completely unknown in many parts of the Hohenzollern lands.⁸⁴

Brandenburg-Prussian 'absolutism' was thus no well-oiled machine capable of translating the monarch's will into action at every tier of social organization. Nor had the instruments of local authority wielded by the local and provincial elites simply disappeared into the woodwork. A study of East Prussia, for example, has shown that local nobilities waged a 'guerrilla war' against encroachments by the central administration.⁸⁵ The provincial *Regierung* in Königsberg continued to exercise independent authority in the territory and remained under the control of the local aristocracy. Only gradually did the king come to play a significant role in appointments to key local offices, such as the district captaincies (*Ambauptleute*). Nepotism and the sale of offices – both

practices that tended to consolidate the influence of local elites – remained commonplace.⁸⁶ A study of local appointments in East Prussia from the years 1713–23 showed that of those posts whose recruitment could be reconstructed from the records, only about one-fifth involved intervention by the king; the rest were recruited directly by the *Regierung*, although the proportion rose to nearly one-third in the following decade.⁸⁷

So pervasive were the less conspicuous, informal structures of elite influence in East Prussia that one scholar has written of the persistence of a 'latent form of Estates government'.⁸⁸ Indeed, there is much evidence to suggest that the power of local elites over key administrative offices actually increased in some territories during the middle decades of the eighteenth century. The Brandenburg nobility may have been largely excluded from an active role in the central administration during Frederick William's reign, but in the longer term they more than made up for this lost ground by consolidating their control over local government. They retained the power, for example, to elect the local *Landrat* or district commissioner, a post of great importance, since it was he who negotiated taxation arrangements with the central authorities and oversaw the local allocation of tax burdens. Whereas Frederick William I had often rejected the candidates presented by the district assemblies of the nobility, Frederick II conceded their right to present a list of favoured candidates, from which the king would select his preferred incumbent.⁸⁹ Efforts by Berlin officials to interfere in elections or to manipulate the behaviour of incumbents became increasingly rare.⁹⁰ The government thus conceded a measure of control in order to secure the cooperation of local mediators enjoying the trust and support of the district elites.

The concentration of provincial authority achieved through this process of negotiated power-sharing was durable precisely because it was latent, informal. The persistence of provincial corporate power and solidarity helps in turn to explain why, after a long period of relative quiescence, the provincial nobilities were in such a strong position to challenge and resist government initiatives during the upheavals of the Napoleonic era. The emergent core bureaucracy of the Hohenzollern lands did not displace or neutralize the structures of local and provincial authority. Rather, it entered into a kind of cohabitation, confronting and disciplining local institutions when the fiscal and military prerogatives of the state were at stake, but otherwise letting well enough alone. This

helps to explain the curious and apparently paradoxical fact that what is sometimes called the 'rise of absolutism' in Brandenburg-Prussia was accompanied by the consolidation of the traditional nobilities.⁹¹ In the eighteenth century, as in the era of the Great Elector, absolutism was not a zero-sum contest pitting the centre against the periphery, but rather the gradual and complementary concentration of different power structures.

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Protestants

On Christmas Day 1613, Elector John Sigismund took communion according to the Calvinist rite in Berlin Cathedral. The candles and crucifix that usually adorned the altar for Lutheran worship had been removed. There was no kneeling or genuflection before the Eucharist and no communion wafer, just a long piece of bread that was broken and distributed among the worshippers. For the Elector, the occasion was the public culmination of a private journey. His doubts about Lutheranism dated back to his teenage years, when he came under the influence of the Rhenish Calvinists circulating at his father's court; it is thought that he embraced the Reformed faith in 1606 during a visit to Heidelberg, capital city of the Palatinate, the powerhouse of early seventeenth-century German Calvinism.

John Sigismund's conversion placed the House of Hohenzollern on a new trajectory. It reinforced the dynasty's association with the combative Calvinist interest in early seventeenth-century imperial politics. It augmented the status of the Calvinist officials who were beginning to play an influential role in the central government. Yet there is no reason to suppose that political calculations were decisive, for the conversion brought more risks than benefits. It placed the Elector in a religious camp for which no provision had been made in the Peace of Augsburg. Not until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 would the right of the Calvinists to toleration within the confessional patchwork of the Holy Roman Empire be enshrined in a binding treaty. The conversion of the monarch also drove a deep confessional trench between dynasty and people, inasmuch as there existed a sense of territorial 'identity' in late sixteenth-century Brandenburg, this was intimately bound up with the Lutheran church, whose clergy spanned the length and breadth of the Mark. It is no coincidence that the earliest historical chronicles of