

The Rise of Prussia, 1640-1740

Ch. 16: State Building and the
European State System

Eastern Europe: Land of lords and peasants

In Western Europe under Absolutism – nobility limited, middle class relatively strong, peasants free of serfdom BUT...

In Eastern Europe (Germany, Austria & Russia): powerful nobility, weak middle class, serfs – from 1400 – 1650 - Serfdom reintroduced by princes and “landed nobility”

- ▶ Lords take peasant lands – enslave serfs
- ▶ Restrictions on movement – runaways hunted!
- ▶ Demands made for unpaid serf labor

Political Reasons

- ▶ Weak monarchs could not resist powerful lords
- ▶ Kings don't protect peasants
- ▶ Peasants had less political power in Eastern Europe
 - Uprisings failed

BUT STRONG KINGS ARISE...

(the point of the story!!!!)

Rise of Prussia under the Hohenzollern



The Great Elector: Friedrich Wilhelm of Brandenburg

- ▶ Hohenzollern Family
 - Elector of Brandenburg
 - ▶ Prestige without power BUT...
 - 1614 inherit area on Rhine
 - 1618 inherit Prussia from cousin

Frederick William

Frederick III (King Frederick I)

Frederick William I

1640

1688

1713

1740

-  Brandenburg (1415)
-  Prussian acquisitions to 1740
-  Conquest of Silesia by 1748
-  From Poland as result of first partition (1792)

0 125 250 500 Kilometers
 0 125 250 Miles



Frederick William - The Great Elector

1640-1688 (21 yrs. old)

Devastation 30 Years' War helps Fred. Wm. increase family power over Aristocratic Estates weakened by war

- ABSOLUTIST - Ignored traditional rights of nobility
- Used military force and taxation to:
 - ▶ Weaken the nobility:
 - Junkers = landed aristocracy (military officials)
 - ▶ Weaken the authority of towns: ex: leader of opposition in Königsberg simply arrested and imprisoned for life!

Use of the Military to Centralize the Government

- 1655 allies with and also fights against the Poles in order gain Prussian independence
- Permanent Standing Army est. 1660
 - ▶ War Commissariat = oversaw taxation, growth and training for military / eventually became a branch of civil gov't. that directly answered to the Elector
 - ▶ Many soldiers French Huguenot immigrants – welcomed as hard workers
- Permanent taxation without consent
 - ▶ Soldiers doubled as tax collectors and policeman = revenue triples
- By 1688, Prussia had 1 million people, 30,000 person permanent army -- and was at peace

Frederick III (elector) = (King Frederick I) 1688-1713

- “the ostentatious” - Weak imitator of Louis XIV
 - ▶ Established and reveled in an elaborate and lavish court life
- Granted title of King by Holy Roman Emperor in 1701 (after helping with War of Spanish Succession!)



King Frederick William I, 1713-1740

- ▶ Absolutist and divine-right ruler
- ▶ Smoker, drinker, crude, mean, often brutal
- ▶ Focuses on
 - Building the army
 - Strengthening the bureaucracy



Characteristics of Prussian Bureaucracy:

- ▶ General Directory - 1723
 - Efficient
 - Successful
 - “Sparta of the North” - “to keep quiet is the first civic duty”
 - ▶ rigidity / discipline / obedience
- ▶ Ironically FWI didn't consult much with the Gen. Directory on his policies
 - They just carried them out



Prussian Army under King FWI

- ▶ By 1740 – 4th largest European army
 - ▶ 80,000 men
- Junkers serve as officers as well as civil servants
 - ▶ Sole control of their serfs as well
- Army serves as unifying force – common in all Hohenzollern lands
- Conscription of peasants
- Soldiers = lodgers in private homes
- ▶ Paradoxically, most militaristic BUT almost always at peace!!!



King Frederick II the Great, 1740-1786



- ▶ Opposite of his father in many ways
 - Refined
 - Musician, poet, philosopher
 - Willing to use the military to expand Prussia's territory
 - ▶ War of Austrian Succession, 1740
 - ▶ Gains Silesia
 - Territory rich in natural resources
 - Doubles Prussia's population