

# Staging a Monarchical-federal Order: Wilhelm I as German Emperor\*

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On 18 July 1886, at 8.30 p.m., German emperor Wilhelm I arrived at the railway station at Augsburg, Bavaria. The Berlin court had ruled out a formal reception by the city because Wilhelm wanted to travel incognito, but local authorities had defied these orders and instead all local notables turned out to greet him. Wilhelm was met by the Prussian envoy in Bavaria, Georg von Werthern, and instantly asked that the mayor, local and regional officials and commanding officers be presented to him. Werthern joined Wilhelm on his carriage ride into the city. The whole route had been decorated with flags, only three of which had the German national colours, with all others Bavarian blue and white. An estimated 150,000 people had turned out to cheer Wilhelm. Turning to Werthern, Wilhelm quipped, ‘this [is what] one calls travelling incognito!’. The next day Wilhelm travelled by train to Munich, where again large masses of people had gathered to see him, stretching all the way to Haidhausen. Dressed in a Bavarian uniform, Wilhelm enthusiastically greeted the new Bavarian prince-regent, Luitpold, upon arrival. Werthern was pleased with Wilhelm’s visit: after years of strained relations between the Hohenzollern and Wittelsbach dynasties, matters had now improved, even if word of Wilhelm’s presence had leaked out and the carefully prepared presenting of the two monarchs to the Bavarian population had been replaced by spontaneous outbursts of enthusiasm at the wrong locations.<sup>1</sup>

Wilhelm’s reception in Augsburg and Munich signified a notable turnaround of attitudes towards him in Bavaria. Eleven years before, public interest in his birthday had been limited to such an extent that only Werthern’s home and military barracks had flown the German flag, not any other buildings, including those of the local authorities. For years after he was proclaimed German emperor, Wilhelm was kept at bay by the Wittelsbach dynasty whenever he was in Bavaria, or he decided to travel incognito so as not to upset the Bavarian dynasty.<sup>2</sup> A longing for an imperial figurehead once German unification had been brought about does not solely explain this sea change. Details of Wilhelm’s visit suggest intentionality—his spontaneous conduct towards local officials, his wearing a Bavarian uniform, the acceptance of an overwhelming display of

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<sup>1</sup>Ein preußischer Gesandter in München: Georg Freiherr von Werthern 1867–1888. *Tagebuch und politische Korrespondenz mit Bismarck 1867–1888*, ed. W. Baumgart (Berlin, 2018), pp. 248–9.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 142, 163, 176, 178, 197, 230–4, 361–3.

Bavarian identity through its flags, and his appearing as the Bavarian regent's equal during his reception in Munich. Moreover, the emphasis on the monarchs, local officials and commanding officers showing themselves to the population suggests a distinct monarchical-military interpretation of the German polity on display. What do these details reveal about how Wilhelm staged his public persona as German emperor, his understanding of the new German polity and how he related himself to post-1871 German nationhood?

These questions bear directly on our understanding of how the Hohenzollern dynasty transformed into the imperial monarchy after 1871. Christopher Clark has argued that this metamorphosis came about with the accession of Wilhelm II in 1888, because the last Kaiser 'inaugurated a style revolution in the management of the German imperial monarchy' which included closer attention to his public and medial self-staging, with the aim 'to fulfil the national and imperial promise of his office', often at the expense of the other federal princes.<sup>3</sup> Although Frank Lorenz Müller has shown that many of these innovations had already been initiated by Emperor Friedrich III when he was still crown prince, there remains the question of whether the early German Empire was in need of a unifying figurehead at all.<sup>4</sup> First, Germany's composite nationhood, which was a result of particularistic state-building policies and identifying the nation primarily through the region or *Heimat*—as Abigail Green, Manfred Hanisch, Celia Applegate and Alon Confino have demonstrated—seemingly ruled out the need for a central identifying figure.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, the first Kaiser had already operated in a polycentric institutional environment with emerging political centres of gravity, as Hans-Ulrich Wehler has demonstrated, notably the imperial chancellor and Reichstag.<sup>6</sup> Andreas Biefang has argued that each of these used sophisticated self-staging to compete for political legitimacy.<sup>7</sup> Thirdly, Wilhelm's biography made him a difficult figure for large parts of the German Empire to identify with, primarily because of his role in suppressing the 1849 revolution in Baden, his conflict with the Prussian Diet in the early 1860s and his part in the 1866 war; but also, as Clark has noted, because of Bismarck's dominance.<sup>8</sup> Bismarck could not fulfil such a role either, since he, as Robert Gerwarth has pointed out, 'never enjoyed undisputed personal popularity while in office'.<sup>9</sup> Seen from this perspective, Clark's argument that 1888 marks the moment when the Hohenzollern dynasty became the imperial monarchy is plausible, since at that moment, as the novelist Theodor Fontane noted, 'the youthful Kaiser Wilhelm II took the reins'.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup>C. Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), pp. 589–91.

<sup>4</sup>F. L. Müller, *Our Fritz: Emperor Frederick III and the Political Culture of Imperial Germany* (Harvard, 2011), pp. 63–148.

<sup>5</sup>A. Green, *Fatherlands: State-building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-century Germany* (Cambridge, 2001); M. Hanisch, *Für Fürst und Vaterland: Legitimitätsstiftung in Bayern zwischen Revolution 1848 und deutscher Einheit* (Munich, 1991); C. Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, 1990); A. Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany and National Memory, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill, 1997).

<sup>6</sup>H.-U. Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1700–1990*, 5 vols, vol. 3: *Von der 'Deutschen Doppelrevolution' bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges 1849–1914* (Munich, 1995), pp. 849–75.

<sup>7</sup>A. Biefang, *Die andere Seite der Macht: Reichstag und Öffentlichkeit im 'System Bismarck' 1871–1890* (Düsseldorf, 2009), pp. 22–3.

<sup>8</sup>Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, p. 588.

<sup>9</sup>R. Gerwarth, *The Bismarck Myth: Weimar Germany and the Legacy of the Iron Chancellor* (Oxford, 2003), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup>Diary entry for 4 March until 8 July 1888 in *Theodor Fontane: Tagebücher 1866–1882, 1884–1892*, ed. Gotthard Erler (Berlin, 1994), p. 243.

In response to this debate, this article argues that Wilhelm actively staged himself as *primus inter pares* of the monarchical-federal order that he wanted the German Empire to be, in order to forge his public persona as German emperor and establish the Hohenzollern dynasty as the imperial monarchy. Wilhelm was not indifferent to the numerous symbolic and constitutional conceptions of the imperial office circulating in political debates and culture before and after 1871.<sup>11</sup> But once German unification under Prussian leadership had been achieved, Wilhelm's primary concern was preserving and strengthening the empire's monarchical-federal political order.<sup>12</sup> Monarchical federalism enabled Wilhelm to accommodate Germany's composite nationhood by appealing via regional loyalties and identities to the German population for popular support and to counter the parliamentarization of the German Empire. Symbolic acts and self-staging were instrumental in making this conception a tangible political reality, which enabled Wilhelm to present the monarchy as a relevant political centre of gravity, next to the Reichstag and imperial chancellor. Wilhelm's conduct was therefore more assertive than historians have previously thought, but also more considerate of the other German states, since he abstained from the multitude of controversial notions that Wilhelm II would seek to project, as Elisabeth Fehrenbach and Martin Kohlrausch have shown.<sup>13</sup> As such, it was not deficient when compared to the last Kaiser; if anything, Wilhelm's reliance on monarchical federalism and symbolic acts to establish himself in his new role was particularly apt given the fragile state of the newly founded polity.

To substantiate these arguments, this article will draw on cultural approaches to political history. This method deviates from conventional approaches to political history, which emphasize institutional and geographical dominance, and instead argues that political agency is exercised through the cultivation of a political culture.<sup>14</sup> Sidney Verba has defined political culture as 'the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values which defines the situation in which political action takes place. It provides the subjective orientation to politics'.<sup>15</sup> Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger has argued that all political entities—both individual and collective—depend on symbolic representation to become a political reality.<sup>16</sup> This symbolic representation takes place on the level of a political *Deutungskultur*, which Karl Rohe has defined as the level where views, symbols and values of the political converge and are contested.<sup>17</sup> Instrumental for this representation are symbolic acts such as speeches, gestures and ceremonial, which mediate the actor's political intentions. Symbolic acts present in a concentrated

<sup>11</sup>E. Fehrenbach, *Wandlungen des deutschen Kaisergedankens 1871–1918* (Munich, 1969), pp. 49, 72–80; L. Gall, *Bismarck: der weisse Revolutionär* (Frankfurt/Main, 1980), p. 451.

<sup>12</sup>Fehrenbach, *Wandlungen*, pp. 54, 59.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 89–183; M. Kohlrausch, 'A Second Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation? Rome and the Imperial Visions of Kaiser Wilhelm II', in W. Bracke, J. Nelis and J. de Maeyer (eds), *Renovatio, inventio, absentia imperii: From the Roman Empire to Contemporary Imperialism* (Turnhout, 2018), pp. 215–38.

<sup>14</sup>T. Mergel, 'Überlegungen zu einer Kulturgeschichte der Politik', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 28, 4 (2002), pp. 574–606, here p. 577.

<sup>15</sup>S. Verba, 'Comparative Political Culture', in L. W. Pye and S. Verba (eds), *Political Culture and Political Development* (Princeton, 1965), pp. 512–60, here p. 513.

<sup>16</sup>B. Stollberg-Rilinger, 'Was heißt Kulturgeschichte des Politischen?', in B. Stollberg-Rilinger (ed.), *Was heißt Kulturgeschichte des Politischen?* (Berlin, 2005), pp. 9–24, here p. 14.

<sup>17</sup>K. Rohe, 'Politische Kultur und ihre Analyse', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 250 (1990), pp. 321–46, here pp. 340–1.

form the collective identity for which the actor strives, seeking to ensure that members of the polity can identify with the institutions the actor deems relevant.<sup>18</sup> Such symbolic acts contribute to the legitimization of the political order and, crucially, are carried out in the public sphere in order to be observed by the public, as Matthias Schwengelbeck has noted.<sup>19</sup>

This approach is particularly suited to reassessing Wilhelm's political agency as monarch and to challenging his presumed dependence on Bismarck, which historians have frequently emphasized.<sup>20</sup> Conventional approaches to political history are of little use for analysing his conduct, because his office and its prerogatives were embedded, both institutionally and geographically, in a federal context, ruling out any political dominance via these categories. Instead, cultural approaches to political history recognize that Wilhelm projected his public persona and interpretation of the German Empire at a time of an emerging mass media, growing literacy, universal and equal male suffrage, a dominating chancellor, newly formed political parties and the Reichstag. He was therefore one of many actors competing within the 'political mass market' (James Retallack) with a distinct understanding of the polity, and he used a range of symbolic resources in this contest.<sup>21</sup> Scholars have demonstrated that Wilhelm possessed a considerable talent for self-staging, starting as heir to the Prussian throne in 1850s and continuing well into his reign as German emperor, in presenting himself as the epitome of the Prussian military monarchy.<sup>22</sup> We therefore have good reason to explore how Wilhelm used his self-staging and symbolic acts to forge his public persona and to relate that identity to his understanding of the German Empire. In so doing, this article not only contributes to the growing scholarly interest in the first Kaiser, but also aligns with the research project 'Die Sprache der Monarchie' (The Language of Monarchy), currently underway at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of the Sciences and the Humanities and led by Wolfgang Neugebauer and Monika Wienfort, which posits that symbolism was an important element of the self-staging and articulation of the Prussian court.<sup>23</sup>

To substantiate my central arguments and apply my method, the article will proceed in four steps. The first section will discuss why monarchical federalism was the defining

<sup>18</sup>G. Göhler, 'Symbolische Politik—symbolische Praxis', in Stollberg-Rillinger, *Was heißt Kulturgeschichte des Politischen?*, pp. 57–69, here pp. 67–8.

<sup>19</sup>M. Schwengelbeck, 'Monarchische Herrschaftsrepräsentationen zwischen Konsens und Konflikt: zum Wandel des Huldigungs- und Inthronisationszeremoniells im 19. Jahrhundert', in J. Andreas, A. Geisthövel and M. Schwengelbeck (eds), *Die Sinnlichkeit der Macht: Herrschaft und Repräsentation der Frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt/Main, 2005), pp. 123–62, here p. 125. See also T. Stamm-Kuhlmann, 'War Friedrich Wilhelm III. von Preussen ein Bürgerkönig?', *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, 16, 4 (1989), pp. 441–60.

<sup>20</sup>See for example Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, p. 588.

<sup>21</sup>J. Retallack, 'The Authoritarian State and the Political Mass Market', in S. O. Müller and C. Torp (eds), *Imperial Germany Revisited: Continuing Debates and New Perspectives* (New York, 2011), pp. 83–96, here p. 91.

<sup>22</sup>F. F. Sterkenburgh, 'Narrating Prince Wilhelm of Prussia: Commemorative Biography as Monarchical Politics of Memory', in F. L. Müller and H. Mehrkens (eds), *Royal Heirs and the Uses of Soft Power in Nineteenth-century Europe* (London, 2016), pp. 281–301; Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, p. 588.

<sup>23</sup>J. Markert, *Es ist nicht leicht, unter Bismarck Kaiser zu sein? Wilhelm I. und die deutsche Außenpolitik nach 1871* (Friedrichsruh, 2019); F. F. Sterkenburgh, 'Revisiting the "Prussian Triangle of Leadership": Wilhelm I and the Military Decision-making Process of the Prussian High Command during the Franco-Prussian War, 1870–1871', in M. Clauss and C. Nübel (eds), *Militärisches Entscheiden: Voraussetzungen, Prozesse und Repräsentationen einer sozialen Praxis von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Frankfurt/Main, 2020), pp. 430–54; for the project 'Die Sprache der Monarchie' see <https://actaborussica.bbaw.de/index.xql>.

concept of Wilhelm's self-staging. The sections thereafter will discuss how this concept was turned into political practice, applying the methodology noted above: it will show how and why Wilhelm chose ceremonial forms, dress and speech as part of his self-staging and symbolic acts. The second section will demonstrate how Wilhelm used travel to make monarchical federalism accommodate non-Prussian states with differing attitudes towards him as German emperor. The third section will show how Wilhelm's monarchical federalism was sufficiently flexible to incorporate local and regional self-staging and the nascent cult around his persona. The fourth section will discuss how large-scale events were utilized by Wilhelm to project a distinct monarchical-federal interpretation of the German Empire which contrasted with the parliamentary aspirations of the Reichstag. The conclusion will lay out how this article's findings contribute to the wider debate on the Hohenzollern dynasty's transformation into Germany's imperial monarchy. Although this article cannot provide an exhaustive account of Wilhelm as German emperor, it can outline how Wilhelm used symbolic means to stage a specific interpretation of the German Empire and forge his public persona. Its concentration on these aspects means that this article does not discuss the constitutional functions of the imperial office or its ideational associations.<sup>24</sup>

### I. Wilhelm's Monarchical Federalism

Monarchical federalism, the concept central to Wilhelm's self-staging as German emperor, was determined by four factors. First, monarchical federalism was a recognition of a political reality of the German Empire that Müller and Hans-Christof Kraus have proposed as a defining and structural feature. Both historians have argued that the 1871 constitution's preamble identifying the Reich as an 'eternal league of princes' acknowledged the reality of the 'monarchical element of the new nation state' (Müller) and required Bismarck to have the other German states join the empire. Kraus has contended that in constitutional terms at least, the monarchical-federal nature of the empire was a structuring element for the period from 1871 to 1918 as a whole. Nominally, the member states held sovereignty collectively via the Bundesrat, which was headed by the emperor as *Bundespräsidium*. Nonetheless, Kraus has acknowledged that the balance between federal and unitary forces in Germany's constitutional order shifted towards the latter after 1890 at the latest, when the Reichstag took a more central role in the political process. In addition, Müller has pointed out that member states lost sovereignty in foreign policy, whilst the tension between Prussia and the other states became more severe with Wilhelm II's accession and Bismarck's departure.<sup>25</sup> However, the fact of this shift does demonstrate that before 1890 monarchical federalism was a political reality which Wilhelm had to, and did, acknowledge.

<sup>24</sup>In opting for these linguistic clarifications I follow Haardt, who has argued for the term 'imperial office' when referring to the constitutional capacity of the emperor or the institutional office, but not its holder. See O. F. R. Haardt, 'The Kaiser in the Federal State, 1871–1918', *German History*, 34, 4 (2016), pp. 529–54, here p. 530, n. 4.

<sup>25</sup>H.-C. Kraus, 'Das Deutsche Kaiserreich als monarchischer Bundesstaat', *Zeitschrift für Neuere Rechtsgeschichte*, 37 (2015), pp. 227–39, here pp. 231, 238–9; F. L. Müller, 'The German Monarchies', in M. Jefferies (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Imperial Germany* (Farnham, 2015), pp. 55–73, here pp. 56–8. See also H. Schulze, 'Foreword', in M. Umbach (ed.), *German Federalism: Past, Present, Future* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. ix–x.

Secondly, monarchical federalism meant that, as Oliver Haardt has demonstrated, the German emperor operated in a federal context in which his Prussian royal office served as his powerbase. He possessed extensive powers, including representing the Reich internationally and the ability to conclude treaties and, with the consent of the Bundesrat, to declare war and peace, but all were limited because their exercise required a countersignature. In the legislature, the emperor needed consent from a majority of the Bundesrat and Reichstag to initiate and veto laws. Nonetheless, the emperor's sway over the appointment of members of the Prussian cabinet meant that he could have a strong influence on policy in the Bundesrat, where Prussia had the largest share of the votes. Militarily, the emperor exercised his role as *Bundesfeldherr* (federal commander-in-chief) as part of the *Bundespräsidium*, but states kept their control over military policy, and the German army was composed of units from member states, meaning that this role was part of the Prussian Crown rather than the imperial office. No money was allocated for setting up an imperial court or residency. Moreover, the emperor could not appoint imperial nobility, but instead had to fall back on his royal Prussian role.<sup>26</sup> Haardt has argued that the function of German emperor was for the king of Prussia an additional office, with the emperor serving as *primus inter pares* of the German princes.<sup>27</sup> Wilhelm could therefore only forge his public persona as German emperor by staging the *Bundespräsidium* with considerable restraint that acknowledged his co-equal role.

Thirdly, Wilhelm's monarchical federalism enabled him to accommodate the composite state of German nationhood, which had several causes. Dieter Langewiesche has argued that the empire's federal nature was a legacy of the Holy Roman Empire which post-1871 unitary efforts could not undo. It enabled Germans to think of themselves in terms of dual nationality, for example as Prussian and German. Moreover, the persistence of 'federal nationalism' allowed for a wide range of types of monarch to co-exist within the German Empire.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, this composite nationhood was, as Abigail Green has shown, the result of pre-1871 particularistic state-building policies by smaller German states, in anticipation of and as a counterweight to German unification under Prussian leadership. States such as Hanover, Saxony and Württemberg initiated such policies to establish particularistic identities. They included new ceremonial to popularize the dynasty, the setting-up of museums which conflated the cultural achievements of the dynasty and the state, and the founding of government-friendly newspapers to sway public opinion.<sup>29</sup> Manfred Hanisch has shown how King Maximilian II of Bavaria sought to create legitimacy for the Bavarian monarchy and state through an active press policy, fostering a stronger Bavarian historical consciousness by setting up historical associations and publishing popular histories and monuments.<sup>30</sup> As a result the German Empire was a 'conglomeration of regional states', as Alon Confino has aptly described

<sup>26</sup>Haardt, 'Kaiser in the Federal State', pp. 534–9.

<sup>27</sup>O. F. R. Haardt, 'Reichsgründung als Fürstenbund', in D. Mußgnug and M. Stolleis (eds), *Heinrich Zoepfl (1807–1877): Heidelberger Universitätsprofessor und Rechtsgutachter* (Heidelberg, 2019), pp. 213–44, here pp. 224–5.

<sup>28</sup>D. Langewiesche, 'Föderativer Nationalismus als Erbe der deutschen Reichsnation: über Föderalismus und Zentralismus in der deutschen Nationalgeschichte', in D. Langewiesche, *Nation, Nationalismus, Nationalstaat in Deutschland und Europa* (Munich, 2000), pp. 55–79, here pp. 55–7, 68.

<sup>29</sup>Green, *Fatherlands*, passim.

<sup>30</sup>Hanisch, *Für Fürst und Vaterland*, passim.

it.<sup>31</sup> Monarchical federalism served as a means to appeal to the population via their particularistic identities and loyalties, whilst federalism in turn, as Langewiesche has argued, contributed to the acceptance of the nation-state.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, monarchical federalism was Wilhelm's own preference. Bismarck's Marxist biographer Ernst Engelberg, who had little sympathy for Wilhelm, rightly characterized his subject's overt Prussian stance as complemented by an adherence to dynastic federalism and legitimist solidarity.<sup>33</sup> The origins of this preference need not concern us for long: given Wilhelm's experience of war and revolution, with their accompanying disposing and restoration of dynasties in the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, his attachment to monarchical solidarity and complementary understanding of his office are hardly surprising. Jaap van Osta has argued that Wilhelm understood his role in more institutional terms, where Bismarck's understanding of his office was more instrumental or German-national.<sup>34</sup> Arguing along similar lines, Wolfgang Neugebauer has written that this outlook applied equally to foreign policy: Wilhelm tried for a long time to promote a dynastic point of view, although he failed to understand that in the later nineteenth century dynasties no longer dominated international relations.<sup>35</sup> As a result, Wilhelm was mindful not to encroach on the other dynasties' sovereignty. Jasper Heinzen has shown that Wilhelm only reluctantly supported the deposing of the Nassau, Hessen-Kassel and Hanoverian dynasties by Prussia after 1866.<sup>36</sup> Wilhelm's deference towards other dynasties was translated into monarchical federalism once German unification beckoned. On 12 December 1870, he wrote to his wife, Augusta, that 'as long as the princes of Germany are sovereign, there can be only a federal state and consequently only a federal constitution'.<sup>37</sup> However, as Dirk Götschmann has pointed out, keeping the other German monarchies and many of their prerogatives in place also served to uphold the monarchical political order against parliamentarism.<sup>38</sup> Hellmut Seier has argued that Wilhelm contributed to establishing the empire's federalism by exercising the imperial office de facto as *Bundespräsidium*, although not as *primus inter pares*, since he valued the Prussian primacy too greatly.<sup>39</sup> However, as the remainder of this article will demonstrate, Wilhelm presented himself, in public ceremonial and

<sup>31</sup> Confino, *Nation as a Local Metaphor*, p. 14. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>32</sup> Langewiesche, 'Föderativer Nationalismus', pp. 78–9.

<sup>33</sup> E. Engelberg, *Bismarck: das Reich in der Mitte Europas* (Berlin, 1990), p. 509.

<sup>34</sup> J. van Osta, *De Europese Monarchie in de negentiende eeuw. Het Britse en Duitse model* (Utrecht, 1982), p. 7. I thank Aad Arendsen for pointing me to this argument.

<sup>35</sup> W. Neugebauer, *Die Hohenzollern: Dynastie im säkularen Wandel. Von 1740 bis in das 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 2003), pp. 165–6.

<sup>36</sup> J. Heinzen, 'Monarchical State-building through State Destruction: Hohenzollern Self-legitimization at the Expense of Deposed Dynasties in the *Kaiserreich*', *German History*, 35, 4 (2017), pp. 525–50, here p. 531.

<sup>37</sup> Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (henceforth GStA PK) Brandenburg-Preußisches Hausarchiv (henceforth BPH) Rep. 51J, no. 509b. Briefe (Abschriften) Kaiser Wilhelm I. an seine Gemahlin Augusta, vol. 15 – 1870, pp. 222–3, Wilhelm to Augusta, 12 Dec. 1870.

<sup>38</sup> D. Götschmann, 'Die Funktionswandel des Föderalismus im Kaiserreich am Beispiel Bayerns', in G. Ambrosius, C. Heinrich-Franke and C. Neutsch (eds), *Föderalismus in historisch vergleichender Perspektive: integrieren durch regieren* (Baden-Baden, 2018), pp. 243–59, here pp. 254–6.

<sup>39</sup> H. Seier, 'Wilhelm I. Deutscher Kaiser 1871–1888', in A. Schindling and W. Ziegler (eds), *Die Kaiser der Neuzeit 1519–1918: Heiliges Römisches Reich, Österreich, Deutschland* (Munich, 1990), pp. 395–409, here pp. 407–8. See also Fehrenbach, *Wandlungen*, pp. 80, 230.

symbolic gestures at least, as *primus inter pares* and exercised the *Bundespräsidium* with considerable restraint.

## II. Staging Monarchical Federalism: Wilhelm and the Non-Prussian States

To effectuate monarchical federalism in relation to the non-Prussian states, Wilhelm instrumentalized travel in his capacity as German emperor. Gaby Huch has argued that travel became important for monarchs' self-staging after the Congress of Vienna and its territorial reorganization of Europe as a means of generating popular legitimacy and uniting their subjects in the national cause. Such travels were undertaken for numerous reasons, including inspections, hunting parties and after disasters. While they allowed for the staging of monarchical power, they also provided cities with an opportunity to present themselves. The symbiosis of local, regional and national authority on display suggested stability in a rapidly changing world and made the political order tangible.<sup>40</sup> For Wilhelm, travelling to non-Prussian states following German unification enabled him to stage himself as German emperor and accommodate regional self-presentation. Two categories of travels can be distinguished, undertaken in his capacities as *Bundespräsidium* and *Bundesfeldherr* respectively, with both following from the constitutional prerogatives of his office. Wilhelm thus travelled as German emperor, not as king of Prussia. Because not all German states responded similarly to Wilhelm as German emperor, this section will discuss contrasting cases from each category of travel, to demonstrate how Wilhelm amended monarchical federalism to accommodate these differing responses.

When Wilhelm travelled to a state that was generally supportive of him, monarchical federalism was staged so as to underline that as German emperor he was a co-equal monarch and to actively acknowledge the sovereignty of the state he visited. These stagings mirrored the limited integration of the German Empire, in which inner-German relations were treated as classic diplomatic relations.<sup>41</sup> This practice can be demonstrated with the example of Wilhelm's visit to Dresden in December 1872, on the occasion of the golden wedding anniversary of the Saxon king, who having opposed Prussia in the 1866 war, had changed sides to save his throne.<sup>42</sup> To acknowledge Saxon sovereignty, Wilhelm's inner-German border crossings were staged in such a manner as to transform him from an 'intruding ruler' into an expression of friendship, a procedure which mirrored, as Johannes Paulmann has shown, developments on the

<sup>40</sup>G. Huch, 'Einleitung', in G. Huch (ed.), *Zwischen Ehrenpforte und Inkognito: preußische Könige auf Reisen. Quellen zur Repräsentation der Monarchie zwischen 1797 und 1871* (Berlin, 2016), pp. 2–5, 11–13, 15–18, 38–43.

<sup>41</sup>C. Heinrich-Franke, "'Integrieren durch regieren"—ein Phasenmodell', in Ambrosius, Heinrich-Franke and Neutsch, *Föderalismus*, pp. 15–51, here p. 24.

<sup>42</sup>J. Retallack, 'King Johann of Saxony and the German Civil War of 1866', in J. Retallack, *Germany's Second Reich: Portraits and Pathways* (Toronto, 2015), pp. 107–37, here pp. 117–24; J. Retallack, 'After the "German Civil War" of 1866: Building the State, Embracing the Nation', in U. Planert and J. Retallack (eds), *Decades of Reconstruction: Post-war Societies, State-building and International Relations from the Seven Years' War to the Cold War* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 198–215, here pp. 206–12.

European stage.<sup>43</sup> Wilhelm abstained from ceremonial before crossing the border, to prevent any suggestion of a triumphant march from Prussia to Saxony. The Prussian court therefore ordered that the train would make no stops on Prussian territory.<sup>44</sup> At Röderau, the first station on Saxon territory, Wilhelm was joined by the Prussian envoy to Saxony, Friedrich von Eichmann, who accompanied him to Dresden.<sup>45</sup> Wilhelm was also joined by a Saxon cavalry general, who would perform the *Ehrendienst* (honorary service) and had been chosen because he had been decorated with the Prussian Order of the Red Eagle, and by a colonel from the 2nd Saxon Grenadier Regiment No. 101 'Kaiser Wilhelm, König von Preußen'.<sup>46</sup> This arrangement had more symbolic significance than the same practice on the European stage, where officers performing the *Ehrendienst* primarily provided company and arranged practical matters. In this instance, Wilhelm's accepting these officers as his aides for the duration of his visit was an additional signifier of his acknowledgment of Saxon sovereignty.<sup>47</sup>

These pre-considered symbolic acts continued during Wilhelm's entry into and presence in Dresden. He rejected the triumphal reception the city had planned for him, since he did not want to upset his hosts by drawing too much attention to his persona.<sup>48</sup> Although he had been invited in his capacity as German emperor, Wilhelm sought to downgrade his presence. Ahead of the travel, Wilhelm wrote to Augusta that 'the city wanted to receive us in an *Imperial* manner, which I decidedly rejected for *this* occasion'.<sup>49</sup> As a result, the actual celebrations projected Wilhelm as *primus inter pares* in the German Empire, rather than a dominant figurehead. At the church service marking the wedding anniversary, Wilhelm sat behind the Saxon royal couple, together with Augusta, Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm and the Protestant German princes, while the Catholic princes sat to the left of the altar. After the service the two groups merged behind Wilhelm, who led the procession out of the church.<sup>50</sup> Although Wilhelm therefore tacitly acknowledged the religious division of the empire, he ultimately projected its unity under his aegis at the end of the service.

Not every German state was willing to relate to Wilhelm as German emperor in this manner, but monarchical federalism enabled Wilhelm to lessen the symbolic significance of his presence in order to emphasize the state in question's co-equality ever more. Exemplary in this regard was his acknowledgment of Bavarian sovereignty while attending the première of Richard Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen* in 1876. Such conduct was necessary because, as Werner K. Blessing and Siegfried Weichlein have argued, the southern German kingdom had maintained a regional cult for its dynasty, via

<sup>43</sup>J. Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik: Monarchenbegegnungen zwischen Ancien Régime und Erster Weltkrieg* (Paderborn, 2000), p. 221.

<sup>44</sup>GStA PK BPH Rep. 113, Oberhofmarschallamt, no. 637, Einzelne Reisen der Könige und der Königliche Familie, vol. 54, 1872–1873, p. 287, 'Reise Ihrer Kaiserlichen und Königlichen Majestäten nach Dresden 1872'.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 272. Von Eichmann to von Pückler, 5 Nov. 1872; *ibid.*, p. 275. Von Pückler to von Eichmann, 6 Nov. 1872.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 255. Von Eichmann to unknown, 2 Nov. 1872.

<sup>47</sup>Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik*, pp. 222–3.

<sup>48</sup>Stadtarchiv Dresden. 2.1-G.XXVIII.39. Die Anwesenheit Seiner Majestät des Deutschen Kaisers in Dresden, vol. I. 1872 und 1882, p. 3, unknown to the Stadtbauamt, 15 Oct. 1872, and p. 9, Kammeritz to Pfatenhauer, 25 Oct. 1872.

<sup>49</sup>GStA PK BPH Rep. 51J, no. 509b, vol. 17 – 1872, p. 129, Wilhelm to Augusta, 25 Oct. 1872.

<sup>50</sup>*Königlich Privilegierte Berlinische Zeitung / Vossische Zeitung*, 12 Nov. 1872, p. 2; *Illustrierte Zeitung*, 30 Nov. 1872, p. 401.

jubilees and celebrations of rites of passage, that sustained its monarchy after 1871.<sup>51</sup> Wilhelm's presence was required because Wagner had conceived the première as an all-German cultural event.<sup>52</sup> Attendees included the Brazilian emperor Dom Pedro II, two kings, the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Prussian princesses, the Austrian foreign minister Julius Andrassy, the painters Anton von Werner, Franz Lenbach and Adolph von Menzel and the composers Anton Bruckner, Edvard Grieg and Pyotr Tchaikovsky.<sup>53</sup> Wilhelm and his courtiers had hesitated, fearing his attendance would overshadow his Bavarian host, but they resolved the problem by having Wilhelm arrive in an unadorned train and in civilian dress, with frock coat and top hat, rather than in uniform as was custom. He was met by Wagner, Wagner's wife, Ludwig II's representative and the mayor. A torchlight parade was held in his honour. Wilhelm also lessened the significance of his presence by attending only *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* and then travelling back to Potsdam.<sup>54</sup> His appearance at *Das Rheingold*, accompanied by the Grand Duke and Duchess of Baden and the Grand Duke of Saxony-Weimar, was met by 'thunderous applause' according to Werner.<sup>55</sup> His civilian dress and departure during *Die Walküre* were met by surprise by the public, who had apparently expected him to remain throughout the whole performance of the tetralogy.<sup>56</sup> By these means, however, Wilhelm made clear that he did not want his presence to dominate the event at the expense of the Bavarian king.

The second category of travel Wilhelm undertook in his capacity as German emperor derived from his role as *Bundesfeldherr*, which although it did not nominally make him a full commander-in-chief of all German armies, still gave him the right to inspect the troops of the various states as per the constitution of 1871. Since the German armies mirrored the empire's federal structure, Wilhelm had to acknowledge Germany's federalism and the respective dynasties' military roles on these occasions. Their inspections were therefore highly suited to stagings of monarchical federalism. Some armies from the other German states had opposed the Prussian army during the war of 1866, but as they were being inspected by Wilhelm in his capacity as *Bundesfeldherr*, the suggestion of Prussian imperiousness could be prevented and postwar unity projected. These inspections were part of the annual military manoeuvres which had been invented by Wilhelm in the 1860s for the Prussian army as an exercise for the troops and projection of the monarchical order. The manoeuvres were continued without alteration after 1871, now serving primarily as a military ritual to celebrate the new nation and its new imperial monarchy, which was all the more useful because Wilhelm refused to have Sedan Day become an annual German-national celebration.<sup>57</sup> In 1876

<sup>51</sup> W. K. Blessing, 'Der monarchische Kult, politische Loyalität und die Arbeiterbewegung im Deutschen Kaiserreich', in G. A. Ritter (ed.), *Arbeiterkultur* (Königstein, 1979), pp. 185–208; S. Weichlein, *Nation und Region: Integrationsprozesse im Bismarckreich* (Düsseldorf, 2004), pp. 355–63.

<sup>52</sup> M. Jefferies, *Imperial Culture in Germany 1871–1918* (Basingstoke, 2003), p. 123.

<sup>53</sup> M. Gregor-Dellin, *Richard Wagner: sein Leben, sein Werk, sein Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1980), pp. 716–17.

<sup>54</sup> *Königlich Privilegierte Berlinische Zeitung / Vossische Zeitung*, 16 Aug. 1876, 1. Beilage, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Anton von Werner, *Erlebnisse und Eindrücke* (Berlin, 1913), p. 167.

<sup>56</sup> Gregor-Dellin, *Richard Wagner*, pp. 718–20.

<sup>57</sup> J. Vogel, *Nationen im Gleichschritt: der Kult der 'Nation im Waffen' in Deutschland und Frankreich 1871–1914* (Göttingen, 1997), pp. 27–46; J. Vogel, 'Nations in Arms: Military and Commemorative Festivals in Germany and France, 1871–1914', in K. Friedrich (ed.), *Festive Culture in Germany and Europe from the Sixteenth Century to the Twentieth Century* (Lewiston, 2000), pp. 245–64, here p. 248.

Wilhelm agreed to hold these manoeuvres in a non-Prussian state every year.<sup>58</sup> Because of the geographical spread of the army corps, all states would eventually be visited.<sup>59</sup> As the manoeuvres' military worth declined and their ritual function came to the fore, these events served as important occasions for Wilhelm's staging of monarchical federalism. Moreover, Wilhelm's active projection of himself as *Bundesfeldherr* happened as the German Empire experienced its 'institutional take-off', a phrase used by Christian Heinrich-Franke to describe the irreversible administrative integration of the new nation-state.<sup>60</sup> As such, this move signalled Wilhelm's willingness to further merge his public persona with the prerogatives of his new role.

Visits to generally supportive states, whether in his capacity as *Bundespräsidium* or *Bundesfeldherr*, could be staged more ostentatiously than travels to more negatively inclined states. The 1876 manoeuvres held in Saxony are exemplary, as they were the first to be held outside Prussia and with Wilhelm attending. Throughout the event, the ceremonial allowed Wilhelm to acknowledge Saxon sovereignty within the German Empire frequently. As the guest of the Saxon king, Wilhelm made it known in advance that he would only accept a military entourage of mostly Saxon officers.<sup>61</sup> In addition, the Saxon king was allowed to formally invite the other German princes, underlining his leeway as the manoeuvres' host.<sup>62</sup> Wilhelm also enquired whether he and King Albert would arrive on the same day for the manoeuvres, a gesture which would further suggest a degree of equality.<sup>63</sup> During the manoeuvres, Wilhelm wore a Prussian uniform with the Saxon military order of St Heinrich, given to him by King Johann in 1870.<sup>64</sup> King Albert led the Saxon army corps in front of Wilhelm, who in return led the 2nd Grenadier Regiment No. 101 'Kaiser Wilhelm' in front of Albert.<sup>65</sup> Saxons present were cognizant of Wilhelm's conception of his role, as the British envoy George Strachey observed: 'They noticed that the Emperor [...] did not bring the Empire with him to Leipsic [*sic*]. Not a word or a movement suggested the existence of any relation between himself and his royal host but that of equal sovereignty.'<sup>66</sup>

Wilhelm complemented this dynastic fraternizing by holding a speech which cultivated German cultural memory to provide a Borussia-historical narrative. In using speeches as a symbolic instrument, he followed his late brother King Friedrich Wilhelm IV, who according to David E. Barclay likewise made oratory a central feature of his monarchical self-staging.<sup>67</sup> Wilhelm's speeches were variously written by members of

<sup>58</sup>Diary entry for 19 Feb. 1876 in *Kaiser Friedrich III. Tagebücher 1866–1888*, ed. W. Baumgart (Paderborn, 2012), p. 225.

<sup>59</sup>For a listing of the army corps, see C. Jany, *Geschichte der Preussischen Armee vom 15. Jahrhundert bis 1914*, 4 vols, vol. 4: *Die Königliche Preussische Armee und das Deutsche Reichsheer 1807 bis 1914* (reprint Osnabrück, 1967; 1st published 1933), pp. 268–9.

<sup>60</sup>Franke, 'Integrieren durch regieren', p. 27.

<sup>61</sup>GStA PK BPH Rep. 113, no. 367. Manöver des IV. und XII. Armeekorps, vol. 1. 1876, p. 1, Pückler to Albedyll, 21 Aug. 1876.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 42. Perponcher to Egcoffstein, 22 Jun. 1876.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 117. Pückler to Konnitz, 26 Aug. 1876.

<sup>64</sup>*Neue Preussische Zeitung—Kreuzzeitung*, 8 Sept. 1876, p. 1.

<sup>65</sup>*Dresdner Nachrichten*, 8 Sept. 1876, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup>Britain's envoy in Saxony to Earl of Derby, 8 Sept. 1876, in *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich*, vol. 1: 1871–1883, ed. M. Mösslang and H. Whatmore (Cambridge, 2016), p. 312.

<sup>67</sup>D. E. Barclay, *Frederick William IV and the Prussian Monarchy 1840–1861* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 12, 49, 54–5, 127.

the Prussian cabinet, court officials or Wilhelm himself, although in this instance there is no evidence to suggest Wilhelm was the author. Wilhelm stated in his speech given upon arriving in Leipzig that it pleased him ‘to be in a city [...] whose memory can relate to events that were decisive for Germany’, thus seeking to present the battle of Leipzig (1813) as a memory with which Saxons could identify as well.<sup>68</sup> Mention of the memory of the Napoleonic Wars cultivated German nationalism and had an integrating appeal, as it referred to a period in German history with which both conservative-monarchical and liberal-democratic groups could identify.<sup>69</sup> The speech was also intended to resonate with a middle-class audience which, as Karen Hagemann has demonstrated, in the second half of the nineteenth century showed great interest in popular and academic national-liberal interpretations of the conflict, notwithstanding that this tacit Borussiaism was at odds with Wilhelm’s monarchical federalism.<sup>70</sup>

If the military manoeuvres were held in a state that had little sympathy for Wilhelm as *Bundesfeldherr* because he was seen as the epitome of the Prussian military monarchy, he might alter the nature of his presence whilst still seeking to project his role. Bavaria provides a counterexample to the Saxon case study. Bavaria’s *Sonderstellung* (special status) within the German Empire meant that it held considerable sovereignty in military affairs: its troops remained under the command of the Bavarian king in peacetime and only came under the command of the German emperor upon the outbreak of war. Rather than attending himself, Wilhelm would send Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm as his representative when military manoeuvres were held in Bavaria and have him stand next to the Bavarian king.<sup>71</sup> This response built on precedent, as Friedrich Wilhelm had a long-standing association with Bavaria. In 1870, Wilhelm had sent him south because support for the upcoming war was limited, with open sympathy for France and antipathy towards Prussia.<sup>72</sup> Wilhelm appointed Friedrich Wilhelm commander of the III Corps, which included units from Baden, Württemberg and Bavaria, to heighten support for the upcoming conflict, although he was kept at a distance by Württemberg’s King Karl whilst visiting southern German cities.<sup>73</sup> Wilhelm was aware of these difficulties, but argued that Friedrich Wilhelm was ‘the best choice to electrify these parts, but it is a difficult task!’<sup>74</sup> After the war, Wilhelm also sent Friedrich Wilhelm as his representative at the 1871 victory parade in Munich.<sup>75</sup> Wilhelm thus consciously invoked the memory of the Franco-Prussian War, through which Friedrich Wilhelm had been associated with Bavaria, whilst having his son represent him at military manoeuvres allowed his role as *Bundesfeldherr* to be staged, if indirectly, after all.

<sup>68</sup> *Dresdner Nachrichten*, 8 Sept. 1876, p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> E. Fehrenbach, ‘Otto von Bismarck und die politische Kultur im Deutschen Reich’, in L. Gall (ed.), *Otto von Bismarck und die Parteien* (Paderborn, 2001), pp. 1–16, here pp. 3–4.

<sup>70</sup> K. Hagemann, *Revisiting Prussia’s Wars against Napoleon: History, Culture and Memory* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 291–6.

<sup>71</sup> Vogel, *Nationen im Gleichschritt*, p. 47; Vogel, ‘Nations in Arms’, p. 249.

<sup>72</sup> M. Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870–1871* (London, 1979), pp. 57–8.

<sup>73</sup> A. Seyferth, *Die Heimatfront 1870/71: Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im deutsch-französischen Krieg* (Paderborn, 2007), pp. 446–7.

<sup>74</sup> Wilhelm to Augusta, 19 July 1870, in *Kaiser Wilhelm des Großen Briefe, Reden und Schriften*, ed. Ernst Berner, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1906), p. 213.

<sup>75</sup> Müller, *Our Fritz*, p. 133; Blessing, ‘Der monarchische Kult’, p. 189.

### III. Staging Monarchical Federalism: Wilhelm and the Cult of his Persona

Given that Wilhelm's monarchical federalism possessed an innate flexibility that accommodated the differing attitudes of the German states towards him, our next question concerns how this concept related to the growing cult around his persona, for in the popular imagination varying historical analogies identified him as having refounded the German Empire. As Eva Giloi has demonstrated, much of the imperial cult was shaped from below by the emerging middle classes and their material culture, including pamphlets, souvenirs and relics, and in a manner that often deviated from the images projected by the monarchy.<sup>76</sup> This cult from below was also moulded by local and regional authorities as part of their own self-staging, for they became more assertive and more self-conscious in demonstrating their authority, economic strength, customs and culture when a monarch visited, as Huch has shown.<sup>77</sup>

In order to answer this question, this section will discuss Wilhelm's responses to the images of him that he witnessed during his annual visits to Constance. Wilhelm visited the city not in any function deriving from the office of German emperor, but rather in a private capacity, to meet his daughter Luise, grand duchess of Baden, and whilst on his way to the spas at Bad Gastein.<sup>78</sup> Wilhelm usually appeared in civilian attire, to suggest the 'private' nature of these visits, but his reception by his daughter at the city's train station and other events during his visit were always described in detail by the local newspaper.<sup>79</sup> From Wilhelm's perspective these visits served to cultivate the bourgeois value of family happiness and to enable his recuperation after a year of labour.<sup>80</sup> But because local authorities and associations did not make a distinction between Wilhelm as a private person and Wilhelm as German emperor, their reception of him was primarily geared to the latter role.

Wilhelm accommodated these images without problem because they did not conflict with his monarchical federalism and substantiated his public persona with a historical dimension by relating him to earlier periods in German history or by drawing on his biography. These images therefore corresponded with what Matthew Jefferies has aptly described as Imperial Germany's 'preoccupation with history'.<sup>81</sup> In 1871, Wilhelm was led through the building of the Council of Constance, where he was shown frescos which included a depiction of the pope being led on horseback whilst Emperor Sigismund and the duke of Bavaria held the reins. Turning to the mayor and acknowledging the

<sup>76</sup>E. Giloi, *Monarchy, Myth and Material Culture in Imperial Germany 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 157–85, 215–65. A full overview of all books, pamphlets etc. written on Wilhelm, and thus contributing to constructing the imperial cult from below, is impossible to give; however an indication of its range can be gained from H. Henning (ed.), *Die Dienstbibliothek des Brandenburg-Preußisches Hausarchivs: Katalog* (Berlin, 2015), pp. 440–519.

<sup>77</sup>Huch, *Ehrenpforte und Inkognito* ed. Huch, pp. 15, 72.

<sup>78</sup>Die Persönlichen Erinnerungen des Chefs des Geheimen Zivilkabinetts Karl von Wilmowski (1817–1893)', ed. G. Besier, *Jahrbuch für Berlin-Brandenburgische Kirchengeschichte*, 50 (1977), p. 171.

<sup>79</sup>*Konstanzer Zeitung*, 12 Sept. 1871; *Konstanzer Zeitung*, 11 July 1874; *Konstanzer Zeitung*, 19 July 1876; *Konstanzer Zeitung*, 13 July 1877; *Konstanzer Zeitung*, 12 July 1880; *Konstanzer Zeitung*, 18 July 1885; *Konstanzer Zeitung*, 15 July 1887.

<sup>80</sup>A. Geisthövel, 'Nahbare Herrscher: die Selbstdarstellung preußischer Monarchen in Kurorten als Form politischer Kommunikation im 19. Jahrhundert', *Forschung an der Universität Bielefeld*, 24 (2002), pp. 32–7.

<sup>81</sup>Jefferies, *Imperial Culture*, pp. 99–114.

historical continuity suggested here, Wilhelm said, ‘I have the legacy, but do not hold the reins’.<sup>82</sup> An illustration of his arrival in Constance in 1871 was published the same year with a title that recorded ‘the return following the victorious struggles in the year 1870/71’.<sup>83</sup> Each year historical theatre performances were organized for Wilhelm at Mainau. In 1880 officers re-enacted a scene from an army camp from the Thirty Years War to honour Wilhelm as a military monarch.<sup>84</sup> These images cultivated Wilhelm’s image as a successful military monarch, which Volker Sellin and Langewiesche have shown to be an important source of political legitimacy in the nineteenth century.<sup>85</sup> On arriving in Constance in September 1879, Wilhelm was offered a drink by the local authorities from a new cup, which was then stored in the city’s museum, allowing the city to put on display a direct connection between itself and the German emperor.<sup>86</sup> In 1882 officers enacted scenes from Wilhelm’s life, using images from Oskar Meding’s biography of Wilhelm. These scenes included depictions of him with his siblings, of his coronation in 1861 and of his great-grandson Prince Wilhelm, signifying the continuity and the future of the dynasty.<sup>87</sup>

Wilhelm’s responses to these images demonstrate that he was capable of merging this depiction with his self-staging as emperor. His jibe about the difference between him and Emperor Sigismund was no one-off affair in terms of his demonstrating satisfaction with such images. At a theatrical performance at Mainau in July 1881, a children’s choir praised Wilhelm as emperor, creating a link between him, Constance and Friedrich of Nuremberg, who in 1415 was given the *Kurhut* (electoral hat) to elevate him to margrave of Brandenburg. After the performance Wilhelm addressed the speakers publicly and shook the children’s hands.<sup>88</sup> The archival records bear no trace of any such events being abandoned because they might displease Wilhelm. If Augusta had not been present, Wilhelm enthusiastically described such episodes in their correspondence. After the 1882 performance of scenes from his life, Wilhelm approvingly wrote to Augusta that the officer presenting the scenes did so with considerable ‘Takt und Geschick’ (tact and skill).<sup>89</sup> Admittedly, Meding’s biography had been authorized by Wilhelm, who had selected images from his own collection for the book.<sup>90</sup> These officers were thus staging scenes which Wilhelm had selected in the first place. Moreover, at no point did

<sup>82</sup> F. Meichle, ‘Kaiser Wilhelm I. in Konstanz’, *Bodensee Hefte*, 3 (1965), p. 17.

<sup>83</sup> Fr. Precht, ‘Empfang Kaiser Wilhelm I. in Constanz, in Begleitung des Grossherzogs Friedrich von Baden und dessen Familie, bei der Rückkehr aus dem siegreichen Kämpfe der Jahre 1870/71’ (Karlsruhe, undated), <https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN80549619X> (accessed 16 July 2020).

<sup>84</sup> *Konstanzer Zeitung*, 25 July 1880.

<sup>85</sup> V. Sellin, *Gewalt und Legitimität: die europäische Monarchie im Zeitalter der Revolutionen* (Munich, 2011), pp. 105–43; D. Langewiesche, *Die Monarchie im Jahrhundert Europas: Selbstbehauptung durch Wandel* (Heidelberg, 2013), p. 8.

<sup>86</sup> *Konstanzer Zeitung*, 10 Sept. 1879.

<sup>87</sup> *Konstanzer Zeitung*, 18 July 1882.

<sup>88</sup> *Konstanzer Zeitung*, 13 July 1881.

<sup>89</sup> GStA PK BPH Rep. 51J, no. 509b, vol. 17 – 1882, p. 55, Wilhelm to Augusta, 16 July 1882.

<sup>90</sup> O. Meding, *Ein Vermächtniß Kaiser Wilhelms I. Ergänzung zu den Kaiserbuch ‘Einundneunzig Jahre in Glaube, Kampf und Sieg’ von Oskar Meding. Unter Allerhöchster Genehmigung Seiner Majestät des Kaisers und Königs Wilhelms II. herausgegeben von Carl Dallberger* (Stuttgart, 1889), p. 1. For a description of Wilhelm’s collection of illustrations of his own life, see H. Granier, ‘Die Aquarell-Sammlung Kaiser Wilhelms I.’, *Hohenzollern Jahrbuch*, 12 (1908), pp. 143–82.

local authorities and associations make any reference to Wilhelm's role in the military campaign of 1849, when he suppressed the revolution in Baden. It is plausible that the omission was deliberate, intended to avoid causing discontent in the presence of the emperor. Above all, these images substantiated in a historical sense the monarchical-military interpretation that was central to Wilhelm's notions.

#### IV. Staging Monarchical Federalism: Against Parliamentary Ideas of Empire

Wilhelm's monarchical federalism also served to oppose any parliamentary understandings of the German Empire or competition with his chancellor and to demonstrate instead the imperial monarchy as the prime political centre of gravity. Wilhelm felt compelled to do so since, as Biefang has shown, both chancellor and Reichstag paid considerable attention to their image to underline their political significance. Bismarck chose specific attire to court liberals or present himself as landed aristocracy and he crafted his speeches to ensure they were important political and medial events. The Reichstag's debate in the 1880s about the construction of a monumental parliamentary building suggests its members recognized the symbolic potential of such a structure. During this period, the Reichstag increasingly became a place of sociability for the political class and the population.<sup>91</sup> This character allowed political parties, as Langewiesche has argued, to present themselves in a German-national manner and with the Reichstag as their primary forum.<sup>92</sup> The challenge to Wilhelm's primacy presented by the Reichstag and Bismarck's persona and political power was observed by his court. Indeed, Otto Pflanze has noted that 'at court some who witnessed the outpouring of patriotic enthusiasm for Bismarck on his seventieth birthday muttered about the Bismarck *Hausmacht* [domestic power] and its hazards for the prestige of the monarchy'.<sup>93</sup>

In response, Wilhelm utilized large-scale, one-off ceremonial events to project monarchical federalism and emphasize the primacy of the monarchy, with the chancellor playing a subordinate role, thus suggesting the proper political order. He was evidently disposed to project Friedrich Julius Stahl's monarchical principle, which propagated the sovereign as the supreme authority in the state. His actions on this count therefore illustrate Biefang and Hartwin Spenkuch's argument that the emperor rejected political modernization and actively exercised his political prerogatives.<sup>94</sup> Wilhelm had already shown his willingness to deploy such ceremonial events in 1861, when he had his coronation serve as a demonstration of his royal authority and the divine origins of his

<sup>91</sup> Biefang, *Die andere Seite der Macht*, pp. 65–160, 241–66.

<sup>92</sup> Langewiesche, 'Föderatives Nationalismus', p. 65.

<sup>93</sup> O. Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany*, vol. 3: *The Period of Fortification, 1880–1898* (Princeton, 1990), p. 187.

<sup>94</sup> F. Herre, *Kaiser Wilhelm I.: der letzte Preuße* (Cologne, 1980), p. 242; H.-C. Kraus, 'Monarchie und Volk—Idee und Problem der "Volksmonarchie" in Deutschland', in B. Hasselhorn and M. von Knorrig (eds), *Vom Olympe zum Boulevard: die europäischen Monarchien von 1815 bis heute—Verlierer der Geschichte?* (Berlin, 2018), pp. 233–40, here p. 234; Biefang, *Die andere Seite der Macht*, pp. 22–3; H. Spenkuch, 'Prussian Governance', in Jefferies, *Ashgate Research Companion*, pp. 33–53, here pp. 35–6; H. Spenkuch, 'Vergleichsweise besonders? Politisches System und Strukturen Preussens als Kern des "deutschen Sonderwegs"', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 29 (2003), pp. 262–93, here p. 272; H. Spenkuch, *Preußen—eine besondere Geschichte: Staat, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft und Kultur 1648–1947* (Göttingen, 2019), pp. 221–2.

kingship amidst the conflict with the Prussian Diet.<sup>95</sup> By the time he was German emperor, such events took place against the backdrop of what Jaap van Osta has described as ‘the reappearance of the performing monarchy’ around 1870: by using ‘the splendour of monarchical ritual’, the monarch would be the ‘vivid symbol of continuity and consensus to which the whole nation might defer’.<sup>96</sup> The two events discussed in this section, the dedication of Cologne Cathedral in 1880 and of the Niederwald monument in 1883, demonstrate that Wilhelm sought to utilize ceremonies to project monarchical federalism under his aegis. Because these events were organized outside Berlin, Wilhelm was able to limit the significance of the members of the Reichstag present, who could not fall back on being in the capital and in the vicinity of their primary political forum. While Wilhelm’s monarchical federalism made a German-national court unnecessary, such events could be invested with a national appeal.

Wilhelm’s involvement with the dedication of Cologne Cathedral signified his own longstanding interest in the project and his loyalty to his late brother’s interest, as well as his recognition of the cathedral’s symbolic significance.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, in the mid-nineteenth century, the national identity formation fostered by Rhenish Catholics, National Liberals and the Hohenzollern dynasty had converged on the cathedral, but this appeal had vanished by 1880, in the wake of the Culture Wars and the empire’s political divisions.<sup>98</sup> Nonetheless, Wilhelm was determined that the dedication should take place before his death, as an opportunity to project religious peace.<sup>99</sup> The Prussian cabinet, however, deemed his presence undesirable because of the conflict with the Catholic Church.<sup>100</sup> The result was a dispute between Wilhelm and the cabinet in early 1880.<sup>101</sup> Wilhelm argued that his attendance was about celebrating a national monument

<sup>95</sup>W. Bussmann, ‘Die Krönung Wilhelms I. am 18 Oktober 1861: eine Demonstration des Gottesgnadentums im preußischen Verfassungsstaat’, in D. Albrecht, H. Günter Hockerts, P. Mikat and R. Morsey (eds), *Politik und Konfession* (Berlin, 1983), pp. 189–212; Schwengelbeck, ‘Monarchische Herrschaftsrepräsentationen’, pp. 143–60; M. Schwengelbeck, *Die Politik des Zeremoniells: Huldigungsfeiern im langen 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt/Main, 2007), pp. 247–81; Huch, *Ehrenforte und Inkognito*, pp. 94–101.

<sup>96</sup>J. van Osta, ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes: The Reappearance of the Performing Monarchy in Europe ca. 1870–1914’, in J. Deploige and G. Deneckere (eds), *Mystifying the Monarch: Studies on Discourse, Power and History* (Amsterdam, 2006), pp. 181–92, here p. 182. See also D. Cannadine, ‘The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the “Invention of Tradition”, c. 1820–1977’, in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 120–32.

<sup>97</sup>Barclay, *Frederick William IV*, pp. 32–3, 49, 286; Huch, *Ehrenforte und Inkognito*, p. 168; K. Hampe, *Wilhelm I. Kaiserfrage und Kölner Dom: eine biographische Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Reichsgründung* (Stuttgart, 1936), pp. 125–38.

<sup>98</sup>T. Nipperdey, ‘Der Kölner Dom als Nationaldenkmal’, *Historische Zeitschrift*, 233, 1 (1981), pp. 594–613, here pp. 599, 613; H. Münkler, *Die Deutschen und ihre Mythen* (Berlin, 2009), pp. 408–10; J. Werquet, ‘“Zwischen Preußen und Deutschland”: die Marienburg und der Kölner Dom als Orte der national Identitätsstiftung’, in C. Breuer, B. Holtz and P. Kahl (eds), *Die Musealisierung der Nation: ein kulturpolitisches Gestaltungsmodell des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2015), pp. 176–80, 182–4, 191–7.

<sup>99</sup>Britain’s envoy to Saxony George Strachey to Earl Granville, 25 June 1880, in *British Envoys*, ed. Mösslang and Whatmore, vol. 1, pp. 362–3; J. Retallack, ‘British Views of Germany, 1815–1914’, in Retallack, *Germany’s Second Reich*, pp. 44–85, here pp. 62–3.

<sup>100</sup>Protocol of the meeting of the *Staatsministerium*, 26 Feb. 1880, in *Die Protokolle des Preußischen Staatsministeriums 1817–1934/38*, vol. 7: 8. Januar 1879 bis 19. März 1890, ed. H. Spenkuch (Hildesheim 1999), p. 58.

<sup>101</sup>Protocol of the meeting of the *Staatsministerium*, 8 Mar. 1880, in *ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 59; Protocol of the meeting of the *Staatsministerium*, 22 May 1880, in *ibid.*, vol. 7, pp. 63–4; *Staatsminister von Puttkamer: ein Stück preußischer Vergangenheit 1828–1900*, ed. A. von Puttkamer (Leipzig, undated [1928]), pp. 116–17.

supported by the other German monarchs and he proposed a programme which would include a Te Deum, a service at the *Krönungsstein* (coronation stone) and speeches by Wilhelm and other officials.<sup>102</sup> His plan convinced the cabinet, which formulated conditions under which Wilhelm would attend, including that the dedication should take place on a day of national significance and the invitations and programme should be reviewed by Bismarck and the cabinet.<sup>103</sup> Wilhelm opted for 15 October as the date of the dedication, the anniversary of Friedrich Wilhelm IV's birth. Significantly, Wilhelm also formally invited all the other German monarchs, ensuring the event's monarchical-federal character and Wilhelm's presiding role, although in the end only the King and Queen of Saxony, the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Baden and other lower-ranking German princes attended.<sup>104</sup>

During the subsequent organization of the event, Wilhelm sought to emphasize that the whole event was being undertaken under the aegis of the Hohenzollern monarchy. His attempts to forge a collective identity based on a monarchical understanding of the German polity must be viewed, as Clark has argued, alongside the creation of collective identities by political movements including liberalism, New Catholicism, anticlericalism and socialist secularism, as functions of political modernity.<sup>105</sup> Wilhelm sought to prevent division by ensuring that the exiled archbishop Paul Melchers would be led away if he showed up, whilst Joseph Reinkens, who had founded the Old Catholic movement, was blocked from attending.<sup>106</sup> Although Wilhelm initially ordered commanding officers to be seated near the royal stand and garrison officers in others stands, many lower-ranking officers had to be seated elsewhere because of the number of German princes Wilhelm had invited.<sup>107</sup> By contrast, for the Prussian Diet and Reichstag, only their presidents and vice-presidents had been invited, as per Wilhelm's orders.<sup>108</sup> For the Protestant service of dedication, Wilhelm wanted the hymn 'Nun danket alle Gott' sung; it would be followed by the Te Deum, with the national anthem at the conclusion. However, when protests were raised by the Catholic community at the inclusion of this quintessentially Protestant hymn, another hymn was selected at Wilhelm's behest.<sup>109</sup> Wilhelm and Augusta took their place in a stand opposite the cathedral decorated with the Hohenzollern coat of arms and that of Augusta's Ernestine branch of the Wettin dynasty; the stand was topped by a large imperial crown, signifying the empire's monarchical-federal order. A charter was signed by Wilhelm and others whom he had

<sup>102</sup> *Staatsminister von Puttkamer*, ed. Puttkamer, pp. 117–19.

<sup>103</sup> Protocol of the meeting of the *Staatsministerium*, 7 Aug. 1880, in *Protokolle*, ed. Spenkuch, vol. 7, p. 66.

<sup>104</sup> *Staatsminister von Puttkamer*, ed. Puttkamer, pp. 120–2; GStA PK BPH. Rep. 113, no. 1074. *Reisen des Königs nach Köln und Brühl zur Dombaufeier*, vol. 1: 1880, p. 82. 'Von Seiner Majestät dem Kaiser und Königin sind Allerhöchste Handschreiben gerichtet worden'.

<sup>105</sup> C. Clark, 'The New Catholicism and the European Culture Wars', in C. Clark and W. Kaiser (eds), *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 11–46, here p. 13.

<sup>106</sup> *Staatsminister von Puttkamer*, ed. Puttkamer, p. 123; GStA PK BPH Rep. 113, no. 1074, p. 33. Von Puttkammer to von Pückler, 27 Sept. 1880.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42. Von Brauchitsch to the office of the court marshal, 28 Sept. 1880; *ibid.*, p. 63. Banecke to von Pückler, 4 Oct. 1880.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46. Puttkamer to von Pückler, 1 Oct. 1880.

<sup>109</sup> *Staatsminister*, ed. Puttkamer, p. 122; GStA PK BPH 113, no. 1074, p. 59. Von Pückler to von Puttkamer, 9 Oct. 1880.

chosen personally, underlining his presiding function. After the charter had been placed in the base of the cathedral's southern tower, Wilhelm gave his address.<sup>110</sup>

His address on this occasion was even more important than the speech he gave at the military manoeuvres, as it enabled Wilhelm to invest this event with a monarchical-federal meaning that was his own. The cabinet had drafted his speech, as it did for the military manoeuvres, with the responsibility falling on this occasion to Robert von Puttkamer. However, Wilhelm intervened assertively, with his changes demonstrating his intended message. He removed any reference to periods of strife and division in German history, writing to Puttkamer that 'the memory of such circumstances, which luckily have been overcome, seems to me unpleasant to mention at such a festivity'. Puttkamer had also referred to 'benefactors' of the cathedral's completion, to which Wilhelm added the phrase 'led by the illustrious princes and free cities [of the empire]'.<sup>111</sup> Wilhelm's changes thus advanced an explicit monarchical-federal understanding of the empire, where the cabinet's original draft had referred in more general terms to the German nation-state. Wilhelm opened his address by referring to his late brother's proclamation of 4 September 1842 that the cathedral would be completed, and to his father, King Friedrich Wilhelm III, who as early as 1825 had had the idea of completing the cathedral. These references served to emphasize the role of the Hohenzollern dynasty in the cathedral's completion, but Wilhelm also underlined the role of the other German dynasties when he expressed, as a local newspaper reported, to the 'all-highest and highest rulers and free cities in the unified German fatherland his deep-felt gratitude for the words and deeds through which these heads of their states helped in completing this mighty structure'.<sup>112</sup> The *Kölnische Zeitung* wrote that popular interest in Wilhelm's presence had been considerable, but according to the Crown Prince the conflict with the Catholic Church had been palpable. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* read Wilhelm's intentions correctly when it reported that the event resembled a military festivity because of the large number of princes and officers present.<sup>113</sup>

This modus operandi was repeated by Wilhelm three years later, when he seized on the dedication of the Niederwald monument, which celebrated the German victory over France in the 1870/71 war, as another opportunity to project the empire's monarchical-federal order. This event too stemmed from a long-standing interest he had had in the project. Originally the monument had been a local initiative by civil servants and the national-liberal bourgeoisie, but as happened frequently with such monuments, once echelons within the government recognized its symbolic potential, these authorities took over its completion and dedication. In the case of the Niederwald monument, the interested party was Governor Botho von Eulenburg, who ensured that the monument would meet with Wilhelm's approval.<sup>114</sup> Not that Wilhelm required

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15. 'Programm zur Feier der Vollendung des Kölner Domes am 15<sup>ten</sup> October 1880'.

<sup>111</sup>*Staatsminister*, ed. Puttkamer, p. 125.

<sup>112</sup>*Kölnische Zeitung*, 16 Oct. 1880, second issue, p. 2.

<sup>113</sup>*Kölnische Zeitung*, 15 Oct. 1880, second issue, p. 2; diary entry, 15 Oct. 1880, *Kaiser Friedrich III. Tagebücher*, ed. Baumgart, p. 367; *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 17 Oct. 1880, morning issue, p. 1.

<sup>114</sup>W. Hardtwig, 'Erinnerung, Wissenschaft, Mythos: nationale Geschichtsbilder und politische Symbole in der Reichsgründungsära und im Kaiserreich' and 'Nationsbildung und politische Mentalität. Denkmal und Fest im Kaiserreich', in W. Hardtwig, *Geschichtskultur und Wissenschaft* (Munich, 1990), pp. 224–63 and 264–301 respectively, here pp. 245, 274.

much convincing: as early as 7 May 1874 he had visited the Royal Academy in Berlin to inspect the model of the monument, and he had travelled to Wiesbaden on 22 May 1874 to view the monument's site.<sup>115</sup> He also attended the laying of the first stone, on 16 September 1877. Whilst in Dresden for the annual military manoeuvres held in Saxony in 1882, he visited the studio of Johannes Schilling, the monument's sculptor.<sup>116</sup> But Wilhelm's enthusiasm was not replicated throughout the Hohenzollern monarchy: Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm did not share his father's appreciation of the monument and believed that the restoration of 'Kaiser u. Reich' (emperor and empire—language that suggested a link between the German empire founded in 1871 and the earlier Holy Roman Empire) was a sufficient memorial to the war of 1870/71 and that the money spent on the monument could have been better used elsewhere.<sup>117</sup>

Wilhelm sought to project the empire's monarchical-federal order and to make certain that all its constituent states could identify with the dedication by cultivating the memory of the Franco-Prussian War. He ensured that the event would take place on 28 September 1883.<sup>118</sup> This date was the anniversary of the surrender of Strasbourg in 1870, one of the conflict's crucial victories for the German armies.<sup>119</sup> But the attendance of the other German princes was the cause of a dispute between Wilhelm and Bismarck. In May 1883, the cabinet was informed that Wilhelm wanted to invite the German monarchs personally, rather than via the organizing committee, which would have underlined Wilhelm's presiding role.<sup>120</sup> Bismarck disagreed, arguing that Wilhelm ought to keep the ceremony within limits by not inviting too many other German monarchs.<sup>121</sup> Had Wilhelm agreed, any suggestion of the Hohenzollern dynasty as a co-equal dynasty within the German Empire would have been nullified. Wilhelm refused to give in, letting Bismarck know that he also intended to invite Luitpold of Bavaria, Georg of Saxony and August of Württemberg, who were depicted on the base of the monument.<sup>122</sup> Ultimately, the dedication was attended by Wilhelm, Friedrich Wilhelm, the Grand Duke of Baden, King Albert of Saxony, Prince Friedrich Karl of Prussia, King Karl of Württemberg, Prince Luitpold of Bavaria and the Grand Duke of Hessen. After his speech, Wilhelm took off his helmet, shook hands with the attending German princes and led them around the monument.<sup>123</sup> Bismarck was not present at the dedication: he cancelled his attendance in a letter to Wilhelm, citing

<sup>115</sup> GStA PK BPH Rep. 51. F III. Materialien zur Lebensgeschichte. b. Tagebücher der Adjudanten 3. Tagebuch und Gedenktage S.M. des Kaisers und Königs Wilhelm I de 1797–1876. Aus dem Nachlasse des Vorlesers Seiner Majestät, Geheimen Hofrath Louis Schneider. In 12 Bändchen. 1797–1876, vol. 11, 1873–1874.

<sup>116</sup> *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 Sept. 1882, evening issue, p. 1.

<sup>117</sup> Diary entry, 28 Sept. 1883, *Kaiser Friedrich III. Tagebücher*, ed. Baumgart, pp. 444–5.

<sup>118</sup> GStA PK BPH Rep. 113, Oberhofmarschallamt, no. 1070, Reise des Königs nach dem Rhein zur Einweihung des Niederwalddenkmals. 1883, p. 5. Von Wilmowski to von Pückler, 3 July 1883.

<sup>119</sup> R. Alings, *Monument and Nation: das Bild vom Nationalstaat im Medium Denkmal—zum Verhältnis von Nation und Staat im deutschen Kaiserreich 1871–1918* (Berlin, 1996), p. 168.

<sup>120</sup> GStA PK I. Hauptabteilung (henceforth HA) Rep. 89, no. 20850. Errichtung eines Nationaldenkmals auf dem Niederwald bei Ringen am Rhein. 1874–1908, p. 80. Wilmowski to Bismarck, 30 May 1883.

<sup>121</sup> Protocol of the meeting of the *Staatsministerium*, 31 May 1883, in *Protokolle*, ed. Spenkuch, vol. 7, p. 129.

<sup>122</sup> GStA PK I. HA Rep. 89, no. 20850, p. 85. Wilmowski to Bismarck and Bronsart von Schellendorf, 3 July 1883; *ibid.*, p. 90. Wilmowski to von Pückler, 27 July 1883.

<sup>123</sup> *Königlich Privilegirte Berlinische Zeitung von Staats- und Gelehrten Sachen. Vossische Zeitung*, 28 Sept. 1883, newspaper clipping in GStA PK I. HA Rep. 89, no. 20850.

health concerns.<sup>124</sup> In reality, it was his anger at Wilhelm's decision to invite a large number of German princes that made him stay away from the ceremony.<sup>125</sup>

As in Cologne, Wilhelm again made his address a centrepiece of the event, insisting that his speech came last, before the playing of the national anthem, so that the final spoken words at the dedication were his.<sup>126</sup> The importance Wilhelm attached to his speech is also demonstrated by the fact that unlike on other occasions, he drafted this speech himself. The manuscript of the speech is in Wilhelm's handwriting, and the absence of any changes for the text printed in the newspapers suggests that Bismarck and the cabinet agreed with its content.<sup>127</sup> Wilhelm related the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71 to the Napoleonic Wars to form an integrating historical narrative and stated that 'the threatened Germany arose out of patriotism as one man and the instrument was the German people in arms, with at its head their sovereigns'. Thus, as he had done in Leipzig six years earlier, Wilhelm again cultivated the memory of the Napoleonic Wars in the cause of a monarchically orientated German nationalism, but this time he also made the Franco-Prussian War part of the narrative. Wilhelm reiterated what he had said during the laying of the monument's first stone, when he had invoked Friedrich Wilhelm III—the monument was to 'honour the fallen, recognize the living and for future generations to follow'.<sup>128</sup> Agricultural minister Robert Lucius von Ballhausen wrote in his diary of the 'wonderful, brief address of the old Emperor' which made a considerable impression: 'The moment the Emperor started to speak, sun shine broke through the clouds and the cannon fire from the other bank of the Rhine that came too early offered a worthy companion to the rhythm of the imperial address.'<sup>129</sup> Such comments were hagiographic and did not necessarily reflect popular perceptions of the event, but they do testify to Wilhelm's qualities as a political actor, in both meanings of that word.

## V. Conclusion

As the discussions over the imperial title neared their end at Versailles in December 1870, Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm wrote in his diary,

My father will, in the evening of his life, enjoy the honours, but it will befall to me and my heirs to take up, in true German sense, the expansion of the mighty structure, and with timely and unbiased principles.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>124</sup>Bismarck to Wilhelm I, 20 Sept. 1883, in *Otto von Bismarck. Gesammelte Werke. Neue Friedrichsruher Ausgabe. Abteilung III: 1871–1898. Schriften 1882–1883*, ed. U. Lappenküper, vol. 5 (Paderborn, 2010), pp. 538–9.

<sup>125</sup>Alings, *Monument und Nation*, p. 168.

<sup>126</sup>GStA PK BPH Rep. 113, no. 1070. Reise des Königs nach dem Rhein zur Einweihung des Niederwalddenkmals. 1883, p. 14. Wilmowski to Eulenburg, 18 Sept. 1883.

<sup>127</sup>GStA PK BPH I. HA. Rep. 89. Geheimes Zivilkabinett, no. 20850. Errichtung eines Nationaldenkmals auf dem Niederwald bei Ringen am Rhein. 1874–1908. Bl. 160b–160c, 'Handschriftlicher Entwurf für die Rede Kaiser Wilhelms I. vor der Enthüllung des Niederwald-Denkmal 28. September 1883'.

<sup>128</sup>*Königlich Privilegierte Berlinische Zeitung von Staats- und Gelehrten Sachen. Vossische Zeitung*, 29 Sept. 1883, newspaper clipping in GStA PK I. HA Rep. 89, no. 20850.

<sup>129</sup>L. von Ballhausen, *Bismarck-Erinnerungen. Tagebücher von Robert Lucius von Ballhausen über seine Begegnungen mit Bismarck*, ed. H. L. von Stöedten (Stuttgart, 1920), p. 272.

<sup>130</sup>Diary entry for 3 Dec. 1870 in *Kaiser Friedrich III. Das Kriegstagebuch von 1870/71*, ed. H. O. Meissner (Berlin, 1926), p. 254.

This article has demonstrated that Friedrich Wilhelm's expectations did not materialize and instead Wilhelm staged monarchical federalism to establish his public persona as German emperor. What, then, do this article's central arguments mean for the historiographical debate on the role of the German emperor in the German Empire and in establishing the Hohenzollern dynasty as the imperial monarchy? Four conclusions are particularly significant.

First, self-staging and the use of symbolic acts gave Wilhelm individual political agency, demonstrating that he did not struggle to be 'emperor under Bismarck', as he himself once quipped, but asserted himself when he recognized an event had symbolic significance.<sup>131</sup> Hartwin Spenkuch's suggestion that Wilhelm relied almost entirely on Bismarck in the 1880s and only intervened in 'small matters [...] such as the dedication of Cologne cathedral' can therefore be disputed, since these occasions enabled Wilhelm to be a relevant political actor in public perception through self-staging.<sup>132</sup> It would be wrong to conclude that such events formed only the façade of the political process whilst the 'actual' political process was undertaken by Bismarck, for, as Stollberg-Rilinger has reminded us, there is no such thing as 'naked' or 'unvarnished' reality, only a reality that is determined by pre-existing attributions and categories of political power.<sup>133</sup> In the case of Wilhelm and the early German Empire, these attributions and categories concerned how the polity was understood and where the prime political centre of gravity lay. Wilhelm sought to affect these processes by staging monarchical federalism to substantiate the symbolic standing of the imperial monarchy. This enactment occurred in parallel with, as Haardt has shown, the expansion of its legislative and executive powers.<sup>134</sup>

Second, for Wilhelm monarchical federalism was instrumental in making his public persona acceptable, by appealing to the German population via their regional monarchs and by opposing any parliamentarization of the German Empire. It allowed the first Kaiser to appeal to the German Empire's monarchical-federal structure, making the regional monarchical the mediating concept between emperor and population. He thus was already doing what Bismarck subsequently, in his memoirs in the 1890s, would propose as best practice: an appeal to German patriotism was most effectively cultivated via the population's dynastic attachment.<sup>135</sup> Unlike the abstract *Heimat* notion, which imagined the nation via the region, monarchical federalism enabled the German population to identify with the new nation-state via their regional sovereign and the German emperor, since it projected a territorially layered monarchical political order and therefore its appeal to nationalism was limited. Moreover, staging monarchical federalism also upheld in public and during the first two decades of the German Empire the notion that the member states maintained their sovereignty and collectively functioned as the polity's dominant political entity, aided by the Bundesrat's never fulfilling such a function, as Katharina Anne Lerman has pointed out.<sup>136</sup> Haardt has noted that

<sup>131</sup> Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, p. 588.

<sup>132</sup> *Protokolle*, ed. Spenkuch, vol. 7, p. 23.

<sup>133</sup> Stollberg-Rilinger, 'Was heißt Kulturgeschichte des Politischen', pp. 16–17.

<sup>134</sup> Haardt, 'Kaiser in the Federal State', p. 551.

<sup>135</sup> *Otto von Bismarck. Gesammelte Werke. Neue Friedrichsruher Ausgabe. Abteilung IV. Gedanken und Erinnerungen*, ed. M. Epkenhans and E. Kolb (Paderborn, 2011), pp. 173–7.

<sup>136</sup> K. A. Lerman, 'Imperial Governance', in Jefferies, *Ashgate Research Companion*, pp. 13–32, here p. 16.

monarchical federalism served as a useful political fiction for Bismarck, but I would add it likewise served Wilhelm's symbolic practice.<sup>137</sup>

Third, Germany's composite nationhood was not a limitation for the imperial office and its incumbent if he did not pursue a German-national understanding of the role and the polity. The manner in which Wilhelm was received in Augsburg and Munich in 1886 and Friedrich Wilhelm's cultivation of his association with Bavaria, on the one hand, and Wilhelm II's troubled relationships with the southern German kingdom, on the other, demonstrate that the incumbent's use of symbolic acts was of genuine importance for the Hohenzollern dynasty's ability to succeed as Germany's imperial monarchy.<sup>138</sup> Germany's composite nationhood was, then, not a limitation for staging the public persona of the German emperor, but instead, as Wilhelm's cultivating of German nationhood and political culture through monarchical federalism demonstrates, how that composite nationhood could be accommodated. Indeed, by juxtaposing it with the Reichstag's parliamentary projections of the polity, the imperial monarchy was able to establish itself as a political centre of gravity in its own right. This cultivation of Germany's nationhood and political culture provides historians with a tool for measuring the success of the Hohenzollern monarchs in their new role. Substantial research that considers the three incumbents and their use of symbolic acts and self-staging in differing spatial, medial and temporal contexts will bring greater sophistication to our understanding of the Hohenzollern monarchy's effectiveness as the imperial dynasty while also laying bare the differences between the successive reigns.

Fourth, if we forego an antithetical notion that contrasts the self-staging of Germany's three successive emperors with the establishment and consolidation of the German nation-state, a new understanding of when the Hohenzollern dynasty succeeded in becoming Germany's imperial monarchy is made possible. As this article has demonstrated, the absence of a German-national conception of the new nation-state for the first emperor did not hinder the adjustment of the Hohenzollern monarchy to its new office—if anything, Wilhelm's monarchical-federal conception made it easier to accommodate the fragile and composite early German polity. The argument that the Hohenzollern monarchy did not fully adjust to its new imperial role until the accession of Wilhelm II and his German-national understanding of the office is then less convincing, for it makes the last emperor's conduct the yardstick by which his two predecessors are measured. It also searches for a symmetry within the German nation-state and the Hohenzollern dynasty, its unambiguous national figurehead, without taking account of the monarchy's specific understanding and projections and the nature of the new nation-state it sought to make correspond with those perceptions. The debate over when the Hohenzollerns succeeded in adjusting to their new office needs to look from the perspective of 1871 and the subsequent development of the German nation-state, for as the evidence in the case of the first emperor demonstrates, a coherent German-national approach was neither possible nor needed. Instead, acknowledging Wilhelm's instrumentalization of monarchical federalism sheds new light on what made the Hohenzollern dynasty the imperial monarchy.

<sup>137</sup>Haardt, 'Reichsgründung', pp. 214, 243.

<sup>138</sup>Müller, *Our Fritz*, p. 114; F. L. Müller, *Royal Heirs in Imperial Germany: The Future of Monarchy in Nineteenth-century in Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg* (London, 2017), pp. 182–4.

## Abstract

This article argues that the German emperor Wilhelm I drew on self-staging, symbolic acts and monarchical federalism to establish himself as the new polity's figurehead after 1871. By drawing on cultural approaches to political history, this article demonstrates that because the imperial office was embedded in a federal context and institutional and geographical dominance was therefore ruled out, Wilhelm used travel, ceremonial and speeches to appeal to the German population via their regional monarchs for popular support. In so doing, Wilhelm deliberately cultivated the empire's monarchical-federal political structure to accommodate the German states' differing responses to the king of Prussia now being German emperor and the nascent popular cult around his persona. In addition, this article argues that Wilhelm's aim was not just to generate popular support for himself, but also to provide a monarchical understanding of the polity and oppose other political centres of gravity, in particular the Reichstag and its parliamentary understanding of the German Empire. As such, this article demonstrates that self-staging and symbolic acts provided the first Kaiser with a distinct political agency, thereby challenging scholars' assumptions of Bismarck's personal and political dominance. It shows that Germany's composite nationhood was not a limitation to Wilhelm's establishing the Hohenzollern dynasty as Germany's imperial monarchy, but rather that his self-staging, symbolic acts and monarchical federalism were crucial for this purpose. It thus questions the historiographical notion that this shift did not happen until Wilhelm II's 1888 accession and his German-national conception of his public persona, the office and the German Empire.

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