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978-0-521-79313-1 - Fatherlands: State-Building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany

Abigail Green

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## Introduction

‘What is the German Fatherland?’ This question, posed by the poet Ernst Moritz Arndt, was to prove one of the most intractable problems in nineteenth century Germany. For Arndt, a passionate German nationalist, the answer was easy: not Austria or Prussia, not Bavaria or Saxony but all of these together – the whole of Germany, with no exceptions. For many of his contemporaries, however, the question was more problematic. In the early nineteenth century, most Germans were Austrians or Prussians, Bavarians or Saxons, first and foremost.

The complexities of the situation were neatly encapsulated by another early nineteenth-century German nationalist, the poet Heinrich von Kleist. In his ‘German Catechism’, Kleist envisages a confrontation between a Saxon father and his German son.<sup>1</sup> ‘I am a German,’ the son declares. ‘A German?’ his father cries. ‘You must be joking. You were born in Meissen, and Meissen is in Saxony!’ ‘I was born in Meissen,’ the son replies, ‘and Meissen is indeed in Saxony; but my Fatherland, the country to which Saxony belongs, is Germany – and your son, my father, is a German.’ But the father remains unconvinced. ‘Where is this Germany?’ he asks. He cannot find it on the map. Had the father asked this question a hundred years later, his son would have found it easier to answer. By that time the state of Germany was very much on the map and German nationalism was an important force in the new Germany. How did this change come about? How far did the nationalism of the new nation state displace older loyalties to the German states and their rulers?

First, these developments need to be understood in terms of the wider European context. Nationalism emerged as a political creed throughout Europe during the nineteenth century. By 1900 it had become a serious

<sup>1</sup> Heinrich von Kleist, *Katechismus der Deutschen abgefasst nach dem Spanischen zum Gebrauch für Kinder und Alte* (1809).

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force to be reckoned with. European history is littered with examples of this development: the unifications of Germany and Italy; the Polish revolts against Russia in 1830–1 and 1863; the nationalist uprisings throughout the Habsburg Empire during the 1848–9 revolution, notably in Hungary; the ‘national’ struggle of the French and the Germans in 1870–1; the birth of Zionism in the 1880s; the mushrooming of nationalist organisations in Britain, France and Germany in the decades before the First World War. How can we understand the emergence of this new ideology?

Theorists of nationalism are generally in agreement over its central tenets: the belief that political and national units should be congruent, and the belief in the nation as a supreme value.<sup>2</sup> Theorists of nationalism differ, however, in their definition of a nation and in their explanations of how and why nationalism emerged.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, theorists of nationalism have sought to do justice to what Anthony Smith has termed ‘the ethnic origins of nations’ – that is the cultural roots of nationhood: a collective name, language, myth of descent, religion, history and so on.<sup>4</sup> This approach inevitably emphasises the extent to which modern nationalisms have drawn on existing ethnic and political units and the loyalties they evoke. On the other hand, most theorists of nationalism have understood it to be a modern political phenomenon, whose origins are usually associated with French mobilisation of the political nation during the revolutionary era.<sup>5</sup> In this context, theorists of nationalism are concerned with how far nationhood can be stimulated or created within a given political unit (the state), as a result of government activity (state-building) and of popular participation in shared political institutions (democratisation). Moreover, awareness of nationalism as a modern phenomenon has led theorists of nationalism, like Ernest Gellner, to examine its growth in terms of the relationship

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Peter Alter, *Nationalism* (London, 1989), pp. 4–5, p. 11; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and nationalism* (Oxford, 1983) p. 1; John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the state* (Manchester, 1993, 2nd edn) p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Tellingly, these issues are the focus for the recent anthology John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.), *Nationalism* (Oxford, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The ethnic origins of nations* (Oxford, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Breuilly, *Nationalism and the state*, p. 1, describes nationalism as ‘an essentially appropriate form of political behaviour in the context of the modern state and the modern state system’. Eric Hobsbawm sees the basic characteristic of the nation as modernity. See Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780. Programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 14. Although Benedict Anderson also sees nationalism as a modern phenomenon, he traces it back to the eighteenth century and sees the Creole nationalisms of America as the earliest manifestation of the nationalist phenomenon. Anderson, *Imagined communities* (London, 1983), pp. 47–65.

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between nationalism and socio-economic change – that is, in the context of the modernisation process as a whole.<sup>6</sup> More recently, however, the modernist view of nationalism has been called into question by the work of Adrian Hastings.<sup>7</sup> Hastings has pointed out the ancient character of the word ‘nation’, as well as the existence in England of hybrid sentiments of political and cultural identification, similar to nationalism, as early as the medieval period.<sup>8</sup>

In many ways, this debate over the modernity of the nation, and the relative importance of cultural and political elements in nationalism, is a diversion from more important issues. Of course, many people did feel a sense of collective identity – whether cultural, political or both – long before the French Revolution and the onset of ‘modernity’. This feeling of collective identity certainly had something in common with nationalism and, in many cases, subsequently formed the basis of a modern nation. Nevertheless, the emergence of nationalism as an ideology was indeed a nineteenth-century phenomenon. In this sense, it is important to distinguish between nationalism and the nations that inspired it. Individual nations often pre-dated the age of nationalism, but belief in the primacy of nationhood over other values and loyalties did not. The idea that we need to know what a nation is in order to understand nationalism – and not vice versa – stems from a readiness to accept nationalist ideas at face value for, as John Breuilly has pointed out, nationalists use the same word (nation) to mean quite different things (cultural or political units) and then claim that these things are, or should be, identical.<sup>9</sup> As a result, the ‘nation’ is a fluid concept that changes its meaning in accordance with the particular variant of nationalism it endorses. Inevitably, therefore, it is impossible to fix on a definitive definition of the word ‘nation’. The attempt to find such a definition is in many ways a red herring, a case of historians taking on board the obsessive preoccupation of nationalists with the idea of nationhood. If we shift the focus from the nation itself to the ideology of nationalism, a different series of questions arises. Instead of seeking to define the nation, we need to understand the relationship between nationalism and ‘pre-national’ loyalties and identities. How and why did nationhood

<sup>6</sup> Gellner, *Nations and nationalism*. Gellner argues that, in industrial society, mankind is committed to a productive system based on cumulative science and technology in order to sustain itself and that this in turn enforces a degree of cultural homogeneity, which eventually ‘appears on the surface in the form of nationalism’. Thus ‘the age of transition to industrialism was bound . . . also to be an age of nationalism’, pp. 40–1.

<sup>7</sup> Adrian Hastings, *The construction of nationhood: ethnicity, religion and nationalism* (Cambridge, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14–19, 35–51. <sup>9</sup> Breuilly, *Nationalism and the state*, p. 62.

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came to be adopted as a supreme value in places like Germany, where cultural identity had coexisted for centuries with multiple regional, local and religious identities?

In the past, the German nation has been taken both as a classic example of the cultural nation and as a text-book example of nation state formation and, by extension, of political nationalism. This demonstrates the extreme incongruity of the German nation as a political and cultural entity through history. On the one hand, the existence of the German nation as a cultural entity for many centuries before German unification is undisputed. On the other hand, at no time (except under Hitler) did political structures in German Europe bring all the Germans together in a single state, of the kind which we would recognise today. Nevertheless, the discrepancy between cultural and political nationhood was not absolute. Recent historians have acknowledged the ‘statehood’ of the Holy Roman Empire, despite the many ways in which it failed to conform to the modern understanding of a state.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Peter Krüger and others have emphasised the attachment of Germans to the Holy Roman Empire as a political unit, as well as their pride in its achievements and its constitution.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, the German nation before 1800 had political as well as cultural attributes. This has important implications for our understanding of nineteenth-century German nationalism in the period before unification, since it enabled nationalism to coexist with more local loyalties. Just as the Holy Roman Empire had remained a meaningful political unit, despite the existence within it of hundreds of different German states, so many nationalists believed that a German nation state could incorporate existing political units without destroying them altogether. Yet the political and cultural legacy of the Holy Roman Empire is of only limited relevance to our understanding of German nationalism after 1871, for the new German Empire was heir to the Holy Roman Empire in name only. In fact, the ‘unification’ of Germany in 1871 really marked the division of the historic German nation, both as a cultural and as a political entity – excluding those Germans who later became Austrian from the new ‘nation state’.

<sup>10</sup> On this, see Peter Krüger, ‘Auf der Suche nach Deutschland – ein historischer Streifzug ins Ungewisse’ in Peter Krüger (ed.), *Deutschland, deutscher Staat, deutsche Nation. Historische Erkundungen eines Spannungsverhältnisses* (Marburg, 1993), pp. 41–70 (48–53).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. For an analysis of these views in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Joachim Whaley, ‘Thinking about Germany, 1750–1815: the birth of a nation?’, *Transactions of the English Goethe Society* NS 66 (1997), 53–72.

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For most of the nineteenth century Germany was a patchwork of states ranging from the very large to the very small, which were joined from 1815 until 1866 in a loose but indissoluble union: the German Confederation (see Map 1, p. 24). The Emperor of Austria was titular head of the new Confederation, although in practice it was dominated by an alliance of the German great powers, Austria and Prussia. This alliance was largely founded on the desire of both states to maintain the *ancien régime* in Germany and to clamp down on subversive and revolutionary forces. Membership of the German Confederation in 1815 marked a new beginning for most German states. For the first time they were truly sovereign, no longer nominally dependent on the Holy Roman Empire. Many of these states had, furthermore, either gained or lost land and subjects during the Napoleonic era and in this sense too they bore little resemblance to their former selves. The onus on many German governments was to reinvent the state for this new context, reforming its institutions, refining its relations with its neighbours, and redefining the identity of its inhabitants.

Yet 1815 did not merely mark the beginning of a period of sovereign statehood for the German states. Countervailing tendencies were at work. The Napoleonic era also saw the dawn of a new kind of German nationalism, which moved beyond a sense of German cultural identity to a more political understanding of the German nation (although the precise nature of this political vision remained unclear). This politicised and ideological German nationalism emerged as a response to Germany's humiliation in the Napoleonic wars and reached a climax in the wars of national liberation against the French. The new German Confederation failed, however, to fulfil the nationalist aspirations aroused by these events. The faint stirrings of German political nationalism subsided in the 1820s, but re-emerged spasmodically during the decades which followed, in 1830–2, 1840, 1848/9 and 1859 – each time with greater force and a clearer political vision.

These nationalist stirrings exacerbated the existing tensions between Austria and Prussia over power within Germany and threw the dualist alliance at the heart of the German Confederation into disarray. This disarray first became apparent during the revolution of 1848/9, subsided to some extent during the reactionary 1850s and re-emerged permanently after 1859, as Prussia sought to force Austria to abandon her claims for hegemony in Germany and was increasingly ready to exploit the nationalist movement for her own ends. These tensions culminated in the divisive Austro-Prussian war of 1866, which created a new Germany dominated

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by Prussia. Popular identification with the new Germany was initially hesitant. In 1870–1, however, German victory in the Franco-Prussian War acted as a national catharsis, paving the way for German unification in 1871 and providing a basis for national identity in the new German Empire.

German ‘unification’ has traditionally been portrayed in part as a victory for German nationalism as a political movement. More recently, however, many historians have emphasised the weakness of German nationalism before unification and the limited nature of its appeal.<sup>12</sup> Instead, they have stressed the strength of other kinds of loyalty and identity in Germany – confessional, regional, state-based, social.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the German Empire has been described as an uncompleted nation state. Historians have therefore turned their attention to the process of national integration within this state after 1871 – a process completed by 1914 at the latest.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, German nation state formation represented the

<sup>12</sup> See Breuilly, *Nationalism and the state*, pp. 96–114; John Breuilly, ‘The national idea in modern German history’ and William Carr, ‘The unification of Germany’ in John Breuilly (ed.), *The state of Germany. The national idea in the making, unmaking and remaking of a modern nation state* (London/New York, 1992), pp. 1–29, 80–102; Geoff Eley, ‘State formation, nationalism and political culture in nineteenth century Germany’ in Ralph Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones (eds.), *Culture, ideology and politics* (London, 1982), pp. 277–301; Julius H. Schoeps, ‘Die Deutschen und ihre Identität. Zwischen Kyffhäusermythos und Verfassungspatriotismus’ in Krüger (ed.), *Deutschland, deutscher Staat, deutsche Nation*, pp. 85–99. Michael Hughes, *Nationalism and society, Germany 1800–1945* (London, 1988), pp. 115–16, qualifies this view. He argues that nationalism was certainly a growing force by the 1860s, but that it remains important not to over-estimate it. Hagen Schulze, *The course of German nationalism, from Frederick the Great to Bismarck 1763–1867* (Cambridge, 1991) does not support this consensus. He dates nationalism, as a mass phenomenon capable of influencing political events, to the Rhine crisis of 1840, *ibid.*, pp. 66–7. Equally, historians of the national gymnastic, singing and shooting movements stress the existence of a mass nationalist base. See Dietmar Klenke, ‘Nationalkriegerisches Gemeinschaftsideal als politische Religion: Zum Vereinsnationalismus der Sänger, Schützen und Turner am Vorabend der Einigungskriege’, *Historische Zeitschrift* 260:2 (April 1995), 395–448.

<sup>13</sup> Notably James J. Sheehan, ‘What is German history? Reflections on the role of the *Nation* in German history and historiography’, *Journal of Modern History* 53 (February 1981), 1–23. Of course, this was not merely the case in Germany. For instance, Eugen Weber has demonstrated the persistence of such particular loyalties and identities in nineteenth-century France, in his study of nation-building in the Third Republic. See Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen, the modernisation of rural France 1870–1914* (London, 1977).

<sup>14</sup> On this, see Eley, ‘State formation, nationalism and political culture’; Peter Gay, ‘Probleme der kulturellen Integration der Deutschen 1849 bis 1945’, and Jürgen Kocka, ‘Probleme der politischen Integration der Deutschen 1867 bis 1945’, in Otto Büsch and James J. Sheehan (eds.), *Die Rolle der Nation in der deutschen Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1985), pp. 181–92, 118–36; Schoeps, ‘Die Deutschen und ihre Identität’; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire 1871–1918* (Leamington Spa, 1985). See also Celia Applegate, *A nation of provincials. The German idea of Heimat* (Berkeley/Oxford, 1990); Alon Confino, *The nation as a local metaphor. Württemberg, Imperial Germany and national memory 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill/London, 1997); Werner Hartung, *Konservative Zivilisationskritik und regionale Identität. Am Beispiel der niedersächsischen Heimatbewegung 1895 bis 1919* (Hanover, 1991).



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triumph of new state structures over an existing 'cultural nation', rather than the triumph of emancipatory nationalism over pre-modern state structures. It is worth noting, however, that the persistence of strong particular identities during the unification period did not necessarily preclude outbursts of nationalist feeling, of the kind which swept Germany during the Franco-Prussian war. Internal differences did not prevent Germans from uniting as a nation in the face of a common foe.

This analysis of the unification process prompts serious questions concerning the states that preceded the German Empire and the kinds of political loyalty that they inspired. What was the relationship between these states and the German Empire which succeeded them? The long-standing influence of the prussophile Borussian School of historians has meant that these issues have already been examined fairly exhaustively in the case of Prussia. Yet Prussia only made up some two-thirds of the new Germany. What of the other states incorporated in the German Empire? How did these states and the loyalties they inspired relate to German nationalism and to the German nation state?

*Fatherlands* addresses these questions from two important angles. First, it asks how state-based identity coexisted with national identity before unification. Secondly, it asks how this relationship developed after unification, as states became integrated in the new German Empire. In other words, the book attempts to establish how national Germany was before unification and how federal it remained thereafter.

These issues are of crucial importance, not merely for our understanding of modern German history, but also for our understanding of nationalism and nation state formation in the modern world. The complex relationship between statehood and nationalism in nineteenth-century Germany illuminates the role of territorial borders and political institutions in fostering nationalism at this time. The study of state building and identity formation in the pre-unification German states helps us to understand how far state-building activities within a sub-national territorial state could create state-based political loyalty and identity. Important parallels can be drawn between this process and the nature of state-building and identity formation in the German nation state after 1871.

The relationship between federalism and nationalism in Germany is so intimately connected with particularist statehood and particular identities that it cannot simply be studied in a general way. I have chosen, therefore, to approach the subject primarily through a comparative

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study of three German states (Hanover, Saxony and Württemberg), although the book will also consider the experiences of other states, such as Bavaria.

The study of nineteenth-century Germany has traditionally focused on Prussia. This reflects the long shadow cast by Borussianism, and by the work of historians like Droysen, Ranke and Treitschke. During the unification period and its aftermath, Borussian historians reinterpreted the German past in the light of contemporary politics. They chose to see German history in terms of a Prussian mission to unite the German nation and so enable it to fulfil its unique historic potential. Recent historians have consciously rejected this tradition. Instead, they have turned their attention to local and regional studies, which explore the diversity and specificity of the German experience before unification. These studies have tended to concentrate on the so-called ‘Third Germany’ – the Germany that was neither Prussia nor Austria. Most studies of the Third Germany have focused on particular states or, where they cover several states, on particular regions.<sup>15</sup> All this has greatly enriched our understanding of nineteenth-century Germany, but it remains important not to lose sight of the general picture. It is clearly right to realise that Prussian history is not German history. We should remember, however, that the history of regions and states like the Rhineland, Hesse and Bavaria is not German history either. The very wealth of German diversity and the specific nature of most local, regional and state-based studies makes it difficult to draw wider conclusions either about Germany in general, or about the Third Germany in particular.

In this book I have attempted to avoid the short-comings of both approaches. *Fatherlands* takes a comparative approach, which combines a general awareness of developments and issues in nineteenth-century Germany with a more specific focus on three important case studies, the Kingdoms of Hanover, Saxony and Württemberg. On one level, the book is a study of three German states and as such it is concerned with

<sup>15</sup> Some examples of this are Werner K. Blessing, *Staat und Kirche in der Gesellschaft. Institutionelle Autorität und mentaler Wandel in Bayern während des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 1982); Lothar Gall, *Der Liberalismus als regierende Partei. Das Großherzogtum Baden zwischen Restauration und Reichsgründung* (Wiesbaden, 1968); Hans-Werner Hahn, *Wirtschaftliche Integration im 19. Jahrhundert. Die hessischen Staaten und der Deutsche Zollverein* (Göttingen, 1982); Manfred Hanisch, *Für Fürst und Vaterland. Legitimitätsstiftung in Bayern zwischen Revolution 1848 und deutscher Einheit* (Munich, 1991); Nicholas Martin Hope, *The alternative to German unification: the anti-Prussian party in Frankfurt, Nassau and the two Hesses 1859–1867* (Wiesbaden, 1973); Dieter Langewiesche, *Liberalismus und Demokratie in Württemberg zwischen Revolution und Reichsgründung* (Düsseldorf, 1974).



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the specific experience of these states and their distinctive characteristics. It therefore forms part of the new body of work on German diversity, regionalism and the Third Germany. Fundamentally, however, the book is a comparative study. As such, it is concerned more generally with the tensions between federalism and nationalism in Germany, and with the role of lesser German states in the unification process. Indeed, *Fatherlands* is to some extent a comparative study with a difference, for it focuses on the similarities between developments in Hanover, Saxony and Württemberg rather than on the differences between them. In a way, it is an attempt to 'join up the dots', moving beyond isolated local, regional and state-based studies to a wider understanding of the Third Germany.

Hanover, Saxony and Württemberg are good subjects for a comparative study of this kind because they had much in common in terms of size (populations of about two million), status (kingdoms) and confessional orientation (Protestant majorities). These three states can therefore be seen to represent the Third Germany in two important ways. First, after Prussia and Bavaria, they were the largest states to be incorporated in the new German Empire. Consequently, the experience of statehood in Hanover, Saxony and Württemberg was fairly typical for the Third Germany, in that it affected a relatively high proportion of its population. After 1871, roughly a third of those Germans not originally of Prussian origin had been inhabitants of these three states. Second, the experience of statehood in these three states was representative in geographical terms. Each state was situated in a different part of Germany (the North, the Centre, the South-West) and subject to different geographical, socio-economic and political influences as a result.

All three states were politically important within Germany. Before unification they had been, after Bavaria, the most important of the medium-sized German states, known to contemporaries as *Mittelstaaten* – literally, 'middle states'. The *Mittelstaaten* were neither tiny principalities nor great powers, like Prussia and Austria.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, they were large enough to exercise political influence within and through the German Confederation, but too small to exercise this influence beyond it. Unlike the smaller German states, the *Mittelstaaten* were not resigned to losing their sovereignty. In 1849/50 most of the German states agreed to participate in Prussia's plans for a 'little German' (*kleindeutsch*) national union excluding Austria. Crucially, however, the four non-Prussian German kingdoms did not. This concern with sovereignty, and the belief

<sup>16</sup> Other, less important *Mittelstaaten* were Baden, Hesse-Kassel, Hesse-Darmstadt and Nassau.

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in their viability as independent states, renders the *Mittelstaaten* good subjects for a study of particularist state building.

Bavaria was certainly both larger and more important than either Hanover, Saxony or Württemberg – indeed almost a third of non-Prussian Germans were Bavarians in 1871. In fact, the Bavarian experience was highly distinctive in terms of size, status and confessional orientation. The greater size and importance of Bavaria has led historians to take it as representative of the Third Germany.<sup>17</sup> Yet precisely because it was significantly larger, Bavaria was in fact atypical and far less representative of the Third Germany than the three states studied here. Bavaria was over double the size of the next most populous state in the German Confederation, Saxony. Consequently, the Bavarian government claimed special status, refusing to accept that Bavaria should be placed in the same category as other states in the Third Germany. Bavaria aspired at the very least to a leadership role among the lesser German states. Indeed, Bavaria aspired to quasi-great-power status on the basis of this role. The Bavarian government hoped to attain such status through a seat alongside Austria and Prussia in a putative German executive. Moreover, the existence of a Catholic majority, and the traditional strongly Catholic identity of state and dynasty, meant that the Bavarian experience of German unification and integration in the new German Empire was unique.

Particularism and the persistence of state-based loyalties have been primarily seen as South German and Catholic phenomena, in part because historians have tended to study Bavaria rather than other parts of the Third Germany. This view of particularism reflects the independence of the South German states from 1866 to 1871, the strong South German anti-Prussian vote in the *Zollparlament* elections, the impact of the *Kulturkampf* and the emergence of a powerful Catholic Centre Party during the 1870s. The association of particularism with Catholics and South Germans is valid up to a point. Nevertheless, the strength of particularism among these groups should not blind us to the persistence of state loyalties elsewhere in Germany. *Fatherlands* establishes the importance of state-based identity in three largely Protestant states, two of which were in North Germany. This substantially qualifies our view of particularism, demonstrating that state loyalties remained important throughout Germany after unification. Confession and geography may

<sup>17</sup> As in Richard Kohnen, *Pressepolitik des Deutschen Bundes. Methoden staatlicher Pressepolitik nach der Revolution von 1848* (Tübingen, 1995). Kohnen's study focuses on the two great powers (Austria and Prussia) and Bavaria (representing the Third Germany).