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0521836182 - Nobles and Nation in Central Europe: Free Imperial Knights in the Age of Revolution, 1750-1850

William D. Godsey

Excerpt

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“The Free Imperial Knights are an immediate corpus of the German Empire that does not have, to be sure, a vote or a seat in imperial assemblies, but by virtue of the Peace of Westphalia, the capitulations at imperial elections, and other imperial laws exercise on their estates all the same rights and jurisdiction as the high nobility (*Reichsstände*).”

Johann Christian Rebmann, “Kurzer Begriff von der Verfassung der gesammten Reichsritterschaft,” in: Johann Mader, ed., *Reichsritterschaftliches Magazin*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig, 1783), 564.

Two hundred years have now passed since French revolutionary armies, the Imperial Recess of 1803 (*Reichsdeputationshauptschluß*), and the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 ended a matchless and seamless noble world of prebends, pedigrees, provincial Estates, and orders of knighthood in much of Central Europe. Long-forgotten secular collegiate foundations for women in Nivelles (Brabant), Otmarsheim (Alsace), Bouxières-aux-Dames (Lorraine), Essen, Konstanz, and Prague were as much a part of it as those for men at St. Alban in Mainz, St. Ferrutus in Bleidenstadt, and St. Burkard in Würzburg. The blue-blooded cathedral chapters of the *Germania Sacra* were scattered from Liège and Strasbourg to Speyer and Bamberg to Breslau and Olmütz. Accumulations in one hand of canonicates in Bamberg, Halberstadt, and Passau or Liège, Trier, and Augsburg had become common. This world was Protestant as well as Catholic, with some chapters, the provincial diets, and many secular collegiate foundations open to one or both confessions. Common to all was the early modern ideal of nobility that prized purity above antiquity, quarterings above patrocliny, and virtue above ethnicity.

Perhaps because this world defies “modern” categories, which in turn help determine how and what history is written, its end has not drawn much attention. The recent revival of scholarly interest in the nobility has not much gotten past the great dividing line around 1800. Many good

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works on both sides of it, though, have appeared.<sup>1</sup> Down to 1789, nobles are now said to have resisted “absolutism” better than we earlier thought, successfully maintained their corporate identity, and even experienced a political and social revival. Though not yet incorporated into our image of the past, the convincing argument has surfaced that noble culture might be more responsible for important aspects of (late) modernity than previously suspected.<sup>2</sup> As the appellation suggests, the “bourgeois age” has presented historians of nobility with different problems. Depending on the point of view, the subject has been either irrelevant or entwined in the politics of contemporary history, as the protracted debates about *Junkers* and National Socialism or Bohemian aristocrats and the Czech “nation” indicate. Time enough has now passed to make reconsiderations possible here as well. Though the challenges to their pre-eminence increased immensely after 1789, Central European nobles are again credited with greater staying power, portrayed as more resilient, and indicted for fewer twentieth-century disasters. But the interest in nobles has remained modest; the literature is consequently smaller; and large chunks of the area, such as the Hapsburg Empire, practically and incomprehensibly remain blank spots.<sup>3</sup> The year 1815 is the starting point for most of what does exist.<sup>4</sup> A look at nobles across the dividing line of revolution furthermore raises the question of the relationship between their much-discussed late eighteenth-century crisis of legitimacy and the drastic, revolutionary shift in the meaning of the “nation.” Nobles, after all, had traditional claims to *being* the nation.

There has been little talk of the “decline and fall” that was the leitmotif of David Cannadine’s analysis of the British aristocracy, though much of the Central European nobility has indisputably been materially, socially, and sometimes physically destroyed. Eckart Conze’s fine study of the north German house of Bernstorff indeed explicitly rejected what he labeled a “linear model of interpretation,” highlighted historical contingency, and

<sup>1</sup> Ronald G. Asch, ed., *Der europäische Adel im Ancien Régime. Von der Krise der ständischen Monarchien bis zur Revolution (ca. 1600–1789)* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2001). The initial chapter is an excellent introduction to the recent literature in this area. Also Jonathan Dewald, *The European Nobility, 1400–1800*, New Approaches to European History, eds. William Beik and T. C. W. Blanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Rudolf Endres, *Adel in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Enzyklopädie Deutscher Geschichte, ed. Lothar Gall, vol. 18 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Dewald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture, 1570–1715* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Mark Edward Motley, *Becoming a French Aristocrat: The Education of the Court Nobility, 1580–1715* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Lothar Höbelt, “The Discreet Charm of the Old Regime,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 27 (1996): 289–302. Also William D. Godsey, Jr., “Nobles and Modernity,” *German History* 20, 4 (2002): 504–21.

<sup>4</sup> The most recent survey of the literature found in: Heinz Reif, *Adel im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Enzyklopädie Deutscher Geschichte, vol. 55 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999).

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called into question “big dates” such as 1945.<sup>5</sup> Though this approach has much to recommend it, it tends to blend out, underestimate, or compress rapid historical change. And the nobility has mostly disappeared, except from the boulevard journals, from public view and public life. Though good arguments could be made for dating the beginning of the process that led to this end to an earlier (1620 or 1740) or later (1848) period, the upheavals around 1800 meant an unprecedented caesura, brought a powerful acceleration of change, and mostly threw the nobility onto what turned out to be an irreversible defensive.

The conceptual shift that accompanied the old corporate order’s collapse in Germany, the geographical reorganization, and the rise of the “cultural nation” has made the problem of noble transition between 1750 and 1850 all the more difficult. Few attempts have been made, possibly because the subject itself is not altogether clear. The choice, justifiable from many standpoints, has usually been to project post-revolutionary formations back in time. Instead of the nobilities of Paderborn, Münster, or the county of Mark, or even the Lower Rhenish-Westphalian College of Imperial Counts (*Reichsgrafenkollegium*), Heinz Reif has taken a look for the period from 1770 to 1860 at the “Westphalian” nobility.<sup>6</sup> Gregory Pedlow examined the “survival of the [Electoral] Hessian nobility,” a group that perhaps underwent fewer legal-constitutional upsets than its Westphalian counterpart.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the nobility in Baden or Nassau, that in Saxony shrank between 1789 and 1815 as a result of territorial losses at the Congress of Vienna.<sup>8</sup> In other cases, “German” or “Bavarian” has been the qualifier, though their early modern equivalents would arguably be harder to come by.<sup>9</sup> The nobilities of the major crownlands of the Hapsburg Empire – Bohemia, Hungary, and

<sup>5</sup> Eckart Conze, *Von deutschem Adel. Die Grafen von Bernstorff im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart and Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2000), 397, 401.

<sup>6</sup> Heinz Reif, *Westfälischer Adel 1770–1860. Vom Herrschaftsstand zur regionalen Elite*, Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft, eds. Helmut Berdings, et al., vol. 35 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Gregory W. Pedlow, *The Survival of the Hessian Nobility 1770–1870* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> Silke Marburg and Josef Matzerath, eds., *Der Schritt in die Moderne. Sächsischer Adel zwischen 1763 und 1918* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2001). The focus of the book is the nineteenth century.

<sup>9</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, ed., *Europäischer Adel 1750–1950*, Geschichte und Gesellschaft, eds. Helmut Berding, et al., special issue no. 13 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990); Elisabeth Fehrenbach and Elisabeth Müller-Luckner, eds., *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland 1770–1848*, Schriften des Historischen Kollegs, Kolloquien, vol. 31 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1994); Elisabeth Fehrenbach, “Der Adel in Frankreich und Deutschland im Zeitalter der Französischen Revolution,” chap. in: *Politischer Umbruch und gesellschaftliche Bewegung. Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Geschichte Frankreichs und Deutschlands im 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1997), 165–93.

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Lower Austria – were more stable, experienced no revolutionary discontinuity, and remain easily identifiable in the century before 1848.<sup>10</sup> Contrasts between them and their “German” equivalents will furnish an important comparative thread in this study.

The revival of interest in recent decades in the Holy Roman Empire has meant more historiographical attention for its leading social stratum: the immediate imperial nobility (*reichsunmittelbarer Adel*).<sup>11</sup> Composed of two elements – the high nobility (*Hochadel* or *Reichsstände*) and the Free Imperial Knights (*Reichsritterschaft*) – whose wealth, geographical extent, and prestige sometimes differed strikingly, they nonetheless shared the privilege of being subject directly to the emperor, of being “immediate” (*reichsunmittelbar*) to him.<sup>12</sup> The Empire’s highest courts, the Imperial Aulic Council (*Reichshofrat*) in Vienna and the Imperial Chamber Court (*Reichskammergericht*) in Wetzlar, handled their criminal and civil cases, including those related to debt, guardianships, and their disputes with each other and the “non-immediate.”<sup>13</sup> Apart from the obvious disparities between rulers of large territories such as the duke of Württemberg, the elector of Hanover, or even the prince of Waldeck-Pyrmont and knights such as Greiffenclau, Franckenstein, and Kerpen, the main difference was constitutional. The Free Imperial Knights lacked representation in the Diet (*Reichstag*) at Regensburg and in other imperial assemblies.

Johannes Arndt and the late Volker Press have filled important historiographical gaps for the early modern imperial nobility. Where Arndt preferred the territorial counts, devoting a pioneering study to the Lower Rhenish-Westphalian College of Imperial Counts (*Reichsgrafenkollegium*), Press’ publications were divided more evenly between the two parts of the immediate imperial nobility.<sup>14</sup> The increasingly regular and lively

<sup>10</sup> Armgard von Reden-Dohna and Ralph Melville, eds., *Der Adel an der Schwelle des bürgerlichen Zeitalters*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz, Abteilung Universalgeschichte, ed. Karl Otmar Freiherr von Aretin, Beiheft 10 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> For the Holy Roman Empire, see Karl Otmar Freiherr von Aretin, *Das Alte Reich 1648–1806*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> In this study, the terms “Free Imperial Knights,” “imperial knights,” “*Reichsritterschaft*,” and “*corpus equestre*,” will be used interchangeably to refer to the lower immediate imperial nobility. The last of these belonged to the terminology current at the time of the Empire and since used occasionally by historians. For the imperial high nobility (*Reichsstände*), the expressions “territorial princes” or “territorial counts” have also been reserved.

<sup>13</sup> For an introduction to the imperial courts, see Karl Otmar Freiherr von Aretin, *Heiliges Römisches Reich 1776–1806. Reichsverfassung und Staatssouveränität*, 2 vols., Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz, Abteilung Universalgeschichte, vol. 38 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1967), I, 97–103.

<sup>14</sup> Johannes Arndt, *Das niederrheinisch-westfälische Reichsgrafenkollegium und seine Mitglieder 1653–1806*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz, Abteilung Universalgeschichte,

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publication of literature on the Free Imperial Knights in the last decades before 1792 dried up with their destruction in 1805/6 and has never recovered.<sup>15</sup> Especially in comparison to the few dozen houses of the imperial high nobility, the hundreds of knights with their scattered and complex territories and their obstruction, from a later teleological perspective, of German national-geographical consolidation have made the subject unwieldy, unfashionable, and untimely. Brought out by the last scion of an old knightly family, Baron Karl Heinrich Roth von Schreckenstein, the “standard” work dates to the third quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> A hundred years then followed, with only a few scholarly articles, before a brief “renaissance” in the 1970s and 1980s probably traceable to the fresh interest in the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>17</sup> Most of these newer studies, many of them dissertations, deal with the corporately more successful Franconian and Swabian knights, approach their subject from a legal-administrative perspective, and have nothing much to say for the period after 1806/15.<sup>18</sup> The exception here has been Wolfgang von Stetten’s treatment of Canton

vol. 133, Beiträge zur Sozial- und Verfassungsgeschichte des Alten Reiches, ed. Karl Otmar Freiherr von Aretin, no. 9 (Mainz: Zabern, 1991); Volker Press, *Adel im Alten Reich. Gesammelte Vorträge und Aufsätze*, eds. Franz Brendle, et al., Frühneuzeit-Forschungen, eds. Peter Blickle, et al., vol. 4 (Tübingen: bibliotheca academica, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> The most notable of these publications was the thirteen-volume *Reichsritterschaftliches Magazin* brought out by Johann Mader between 1780 and 1790. Also important were the works of Johann Jacob Moser, *Vermischte Nachrichten von Reichs=Ritterschaftlichen Sachen*, 6 parts (Nuremberg: Raspe, 1772–3), and *Neueste Geschichte der unmittelbaren Reichsritterschaft, unter denen Kaysern Matthia, Ferdinand II., Ferdinand III., Leopold, Joseph I., Carl VI., Carl VII., Franz und Joseph II mit Betrachtungen darüber*, 2 parts (Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig, 1775–6).

<sup>16</sup> Karl Heinrich Freiherr Roth von Schreckenstein, *Geschichte der ehemaligen Reichsritterschaft in Schwaben, Franken und am Rheinstrome*, 2 vols. (Freiburg im Breisgau and Tübingen: Laupp, 1859/1871).

<sup>17</sup> The chief publications before the 1970s on the later history of the knights were: Heinrich Müller, *Der letzte Kampf der Reichsritterschaft um ihre Selbstständigkeit (1750–1815)*, Historische Studien, no. 77 (Berlin: Eberling, 1910); Gotthold Weicker, *Die Haltung Kursachsens im Streite um die unmittelbare Reichsritterschaft in den Jahren 1803–1806* (Rudolstadt, 1906); J. G. Weiss, “Die Reichsritterschaft beim Ende des alten Reichs,” *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins*, New Series, vol. 8 (1893): 289–311.

<sup>18</sup> Dieter Hellstern, *Der Ritterkanton Neckar-Schwarzwald 1560–1805. Untersuchungen über die Korporationsverfassung, die Funktionen des Ritterkantons und die Mitgliedsfamilien* (Tübingen: Laupp, 1971); Hartmann Freiherr von Mauchenheim genannt Bechtolsheim, *Des Heiligen Römischen Reichs unmittelbare-freie Ritterschaft zu Franken Ort Steigerwald im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zur Verfassungs- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte des reichsunmittelbaren Adels*, 2 vols., Veröffentlichungen der Gesellschaft für Fränkischen Geschichte, Series 9, vol. 31 (Würzburg: Schöningh, 1972); Gert Kollmer, *Die schwäbische Reichsritterschaft zwischen Westfälischem Frieden und Reichsdeputationshauptschluß. Untersuchung zur wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Lage der Reichsritterschaft in den Ritterkantonen Neckar-Schwarzwald und Kocher*, Schriften zur südwestdeutschen Landeskunde, eds. Hansmartin Decker-Hauff, et al., vol. 17 (Stuttgart: Müller & Gräff, 1979); the essays by Gert Kollmer, Volker Press, and Werner Kundert in Franz Quarthal, ed., *Zwischen Schwarzwald und Schwäbischer Alb. Das Land am oberen Neckar*, Veröffentlichung des Alemannischen Instituts Freiburg i.Br. (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1984); Thomas Schulz, *Der Kanton Kocher der Schwäbischen*

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Odenwald, which brings the story down past 1815.<sup>19</sup> A few modern prosopographical or genealogical investigations of knightly families round out the picture.<sup>20</sup>

The forced assimilation of the Free Imperial Knights into the nobilities of neighboring states deprived them, unlike the similarly mediatised high nobility – known as *Standesherren* – and despite abortive efforts at organization, of a recognizable public profile in the nineteenth century. More compact, generally richer, and fitted out by the signatories in Vienna with the status of regnant birth, the high nobility has attracted considerable attention. Heinz Gollwitzer's classic work covers the years between 1815 and 1918 and remains basic.<sup>21</sup> Later historians have tended to follow Gollwitzer's lead, have not crossed the great divide around 1800, and have taken 1806 or 1815 as the starting point. Several case-studies of individual houses – Fürstenberg, Hohenlohe, and Windisch-Grätz – have come out, as has a volume devoted to those families of the high nobility that came under Baden's sovereignty.<sup>22</sup> Only Eva Kell and Harald Stockert, taking on

*Reichsritterschaft 1542–1805. Entstehung, Geschichte, Verfassung und Mitgliederstruktur eines korporativen Adelsverbandes im System des alten Reiches*, Esslinger Studien, Schriftenreihe, ed. Stadtarchiv Esslingen am Neckar, vol. 7 (Esslingen, 1986); Paul Sörgel, *Der Ritterkanton an der Baunach in den Haßbergen* (n.p., 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Wolfgang von Stetten, *Die Rechtsstellung der unmittelbaren freien Reichsritterschaft, ihre Mediatisierung und ihre Stellung in den neuen Landen. Dargestellt am fränkischen Kanton Odenwald*. Forschungen aus Württembergisch Franken, vol. 8 (n.p., 1973).

<sup>20</sup> Eberhard Freiherr von Eyb, *Das reichsritterliche Geschlecht der Freiherren von Eyb*, Veröffentlichungen der Gesellschaft für Fränkische Geschichte, Series 9, Darstellungen aus der fränkischen Geschichte, vol. 29 (Neustadt an der Aisch: Degener, 1984); Gerhard Rechter, *Die Seckendorff. Quellen und Studien zur Genealogie und Besitzgeschichte*, 2 vols., Veröffentlichungen der Gesellschaft für Fränkische Geschichte, Series 9, Darstellungen aus der fränkischen Geschichte, vol. 36 (Neustadt an der Aisch: Degener, 1987); Martin Stingl, *Reichsfreiheit und Fürstendienst. Die Dienstbeziehungen der von Bibra 1500 bis 1806*, Veröffentlichungen der Gesellschaft für Fränkische Geschichte, Series 9, Darstellungen aus der fränkischen Geschichte, vol. 41 (Neustadt an der Aisch: Degener, 1994); Friedhelm Jürgensmeier, ed., *Die von Walderdorff. Acht Jahrhunderte Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Region-Reich-Kirche und einem rheinischen Adelsgeschlecht* (Cologne: Verlag des Rheinischen Vereins für Denkmalpflege und Landschaftsschutz, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Heinz Gollwitzer, *Die Standesherren. Die politische und gesellschaftliche Stellung der Mediatisierten 1815–1918*, 2nd, revised and expanded edn (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964). The subtitle is a misnomer, as he ignores the *Reichsritterschaft*, which, like the high nobility, was mediatised by Article XIV of the Act of the Congress of Vienna and encompassed the great majority of the families that lost their previous independence.

<sup>22</sup> Erwein Eltz, *Die Modernisierung einer Standesherrschaft. Karl Egon III. und das Haus Fürstenberg in den Jahren nach 1848/49* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1980); Hartmut Weber, *Die Fürsten von Hohenlohe im Vormärz. Politische und soziale Verhaltensweisen württembergischer Standesherren in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Forschungen aus Württembergisch Franken, vol. 11 (Schwäbisch Hall: Historischer Verein für Württembergisch Franken, 1977); Hannes Stekl and Marija Wakounig, *Windisch-Grätz. Ein Fürstenhaus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, Cologne, and Weimar: Böhlau, 1992); and, Martin Furtwängler, *Die Standesherren in Baden (1806–1848). Politische und soziale Verhaltensweisen einer bedrängten Elite*, Europäische Hochschulschriften, Series 3, Geschichte und ihre Hilfswissenschaften, vol. 693 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1996).



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the Leiningens and Löwensteins respectively, have bridged the difficult gap between old regime and late modernity.<sup>23</sup>

No similar attempt has been made for the Free Imperial Knights, which is the focus of the present work. By the later 1700s, the corporation had overcome several threatening, potentially mortal challenges from territorial princes such as Württemberg, who never fully accepted knightly claims to independence.<sup>24</sup> If the preoccupation of publicists with the group is any indication, then a halting constitutional revival set in in the later eighteenth century. At most such a revival encompassed two of the three circles (*Ritterkreise*), the Franconian and the Swabian, into which the knights were organized, with the Rhenish beset by many difficulties. The circles were subdivided into cantons, each of which was a “noble republic” unto itself and had a director (*Ritterhauptmann*), a directorate composed of noble councilors (*Ritterräte und Ausschüsse*), and non-noble legal and clerical staff (including syndics and legal advisers). In the 1780s, the six cantons of the Franconian Circle with their seats were as follows: Odenwald (Kochendorf bei Heilbronn), Steigerwald (Erlangen), Altmühl (Wilhermsdorf bei Emskirchen), Baunach (Nuremberg), Rhön-Werra (Schweinfurt), and Gebirg (Bamberg). Five cantons made up the next largest, Swabian Circle: Danube (Ehingen), Hegau-Allgäu-Bodensee (Radolfzell), Kocher (Esslingen), Kraichgau (Heilbronn), and Neckar-Schwarzwald (Tübingen). Affiliated with the last-named canton was the semi-autonomous District Ortenau, which was further the chief organizational link to the Lower Alsatian *noblesse immédiate* that in the seventeenth century had passed under nominal French sovereignty and that still had vague but real imperial ties. The smallest of the circles was the Rhenish with three cantons: Upper Rhine (Mainz), Lower Rhine (Koblenz), and Middle Rhine (Friedberg). That two of the three Rhenish cantons were headquartered in major ecclesiastical states was indicative of the close relationship between them and the knights.

<sup>23</sup> Eva Kell, *Das Fürstentum Leiningen. Umbruchserfahrungen einer Adelherrschaft zur Zeit der Französischen Revolution*, Beiträge zur pfälzischen Geschichte, vol. 5 (Kaiserslautern: Institut für pfälzische Geschichte und Volkskunde 1993); Harald Stocker, *Adel im Übergang. Die Fürsten und Grafen von Löwenstein-Wertheim zwischen Landesherrschaft und Standesherrschaft 1780–1850*, Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für geschichtliche Landeskunde in Baden-Württemberg, Series B, Forschungen, vol. 144 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> For an introduction to the Free Imperial Knights, see Volker Press, “Reichsritterschaften,” in: Kurt G. A. Jeserich, Hans Pohl, and Georg-Christoph von Unruh, eds., *Deutsche Verwaltungsgeschichte*, vol. 1: *Vom Spätmittelalter bis zum Ende des Reiches* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983), 679–89; Volker Press, “Die Reichsritterschaft im Reich der frühen Neuzeit,” *Nassauer Annalen* 87 (1976): 101–22.

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According to traditional counting, the Free Imperial Knights in all three circles numbered some 350 families who owned around 1,500 estates that covered 200 square miles with 400,000 inhabitants.<sup>25</sup> This estimate is based on claims for compensation during the revolutionary era, has since been adopted in the scholarly literature, and is probably more accurate for the corporation's geographical extent than for its membership. In fact, the corporation must have had more than 400 landed families, while the total number of member-families – landed and non-landed (the latter called *Personalisten*) – may have been above 500.<sup>26</sup> The discrepancy in the number of landed families probably stems from the lack of a reliable list for those in Canton Lower Rhine. The corporation furthermore regularly admitted members who had not (yet) acquired estates under knightly jurisdiction. They were not included in the lists of knights demanding compensation, which accounts for the difference of perhaps some 100 families between landed and non-landed.

The problem of numbers has understandably been seen as a nearly insuperable obstacle to any “comprehensive” survey of the Free Imperial Knights. In geographical terms, even Schreckenstein's nineteenth-century “general” history crassly passed over the Rhenish knights in favor of the Swabians. Basic prosopographical data is lacking; the primary material that still exists is scattered throughout Central Europe and is in both public and private hands; the published sources are few; and, the secondary literature is mostly sparse, spotty, and stale. For these reasons, a manageable scope was necessary here as well. Instead of the usual concentration on one or two cantons, whereby a claim to validity for the entire corpus is harder, the knightly houses active in the second half of the eighteenth century in Electoral Mainz, the “Dorado” of the Free Imperial Knights, have been taken as the experimental sample. Some 108 families belonged to this group between 1743, the year in which Count Johann Friedrich Carl Ostein (1689–1763) ascended the archepiscopal throne, and the electorate's end in 1803. Of these, sixty families were represented in Mainz's cathedral chapter and they provide the study's core-sample and main focus. Mainz's bureaucracy, bloated officer corps, and Court provided other areas of noble “outdoor relief”.<sup>27</sup>

No state was as closely associated with the Free Imperial Knights as Mainz, which was the Empire's premier ecclesiastical state and whose ruler

<sup>25</sup> Müller, *Der letzte Kampf der Reichsritterschaft*, 16–17.

<sup>26</sup> See the Appendix for a list of Free Imperial Knights (1797).

<sup>27</sup> T. C. W. Blanning, *Reform and Revolution in Mainz 1743–1803*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern History, eds. J. H. Elliot and H. G. Koenigsberger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 52–9.



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was imperial arch-chancellor and second only to the emperor. These nobles dominated it politically through the cathedral chapter, socially through the pedigree (*Ahnenprobe*), and economically through their access to the electorate's wealth and their own great riches. Mainz's prestige attracted families from all three knightly circles, with Catholics from the Rhineland most numerous. About half of the noble houses whose agnates held seats in the cathedral chapter were primarily Rhenish, though the location of its estates – from Lorraine to Slavonia – makes any simple classification difficult. The other half had its landed seats elsewhere, the second largest contingent coming from Franconia, followed by Swabia, Lower Alsace, and Luxembourg. Our core-sample thus offers a geographical range not possible to achieve by focusing on a single canton or circle. Though Roman Catholics obviously had an absolute monopoly on the coveted canonicates, many Protestant knights – including those on Canton Upper Rhine's directorate – lived in this mild and tolerant ecclesiastical state. The well-bred among them mixed socially, went to Court, held commissions, and served the elector in high capacities. Protestants will appear often in the pages that follow and Chapter 7 treats the most famous Protestant knight of all.

There is nonetheless a predilection here for the Free Imperial Knights' pedigree, Catholic, and Rhenish element that otherwise bears some justification. As the review of the literature indicated, the knightly circle in the Rhineland has invariably been slighted in favor of its larger, more generously organized, and constitutionally more secure analogues in Swabia and Franconia. Its three cantons, two of which (Upper Rhine and Lower Rhine) were located on the left bank and were the first knightly institutions after that in Lower Alsace to go under during the revolution, have never been the subject of sustained scholarly inquiry. A small, highly endogamous group of their constitutive families has been examined by Christophe Duhamelle, who paid particular attention to those in Canton Lower Rhine, those who professed allegiance to Rome, and those most successful in procuring ecclesiastical benefices. He especially treated the process by which this nobility used its access to the Church to pile up private wealth.<sup>28</sup> Thanks to their opulence and the cathedral chapter's great prestige, the canons in Mainz have also drawn sporadic attention, including the only newer article on the

<sup>28</sup> Christophe Duhamelle, *L'Héritage collectif. La Noblesse d'église rhénane 17e-18e siècles*, Recherches d'histoire et de sciences sociales, 82 (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1998). Duhamelle's dissertation, "La Noblesse d'église. Famille et pouvoir dans la chevalerie immédiate rhénane, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Paris-I, 1994), which was the basis for *L'Héritage collectif*, is the version that will be cited here. Also see Christophe Duhamelle, "Parenté et Orientation sociale: La Chevalerie immédiate rhénane, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles," *Annales de Démographie Historique* (1995): 59–73; Christophe Duhamelle, "Allianzfeld und Familienpolitik der von Walderdorff im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert," in: Jürgensmeier, ed., *Die von Walderdorff*, 125–44.

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0521836182 - Nobles and Nation in Central Europe: Free Imperial Knights in the Age of Revolution, 1750-1850

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Excerpt

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subject in English.<sup>29</sup> Biographies of a few major figures – Dalberg, Erthal, and Groschlag – have also appeared. T. C. W. Blanning's indispensable history and F. G. Dreyfus' socio-cultural survey of late Electoral Mainz round off the handful of significant secondary sources.<sup>30</sup> Unlike Duhamelle, neither Blanning nor Dreyfus was much concerned with the nobility per se and even the electors mostly want for chroniclers.

That Mainz's pedigreed elite, as represented in the cathedral chapter, corresponded to the early modern ideal of nobility in Central Europe especially recommends its investigation and broadens the significance beyond the sample. Our own understanding of nobility has become so different from what was earlier prevalent that it tends to be projected back in time. Indeed, the contention that the concept of nobility underwent no change in the transition to the nineteenth century has recently been made by Heinz Reif.<sup>31</sup> It will be a central thesis of the present study that the older ideal was discredited in the revolution, that the newer one became intrinsically linked to the Herderian notion of the nation, and that the nobility began to take on a modern "national-cultural" identity. As we shall see in Chapter 2, the concept of *Uradel* (literally "ancient nobility"), which refers to the descent in the male line from an early "German" nobility, which was a construct of very late Enlightened historiography, which is still in use today, and which embodies a very definite image of prestige, was unknown before the 1780s. Neither the term nor the idea behind it had earlier existed. Instead, nobles derived standing and esteem from pure bloodlines on both the maternal and paternal sides, such as were demanded for admission to collegiate foundations, cathedral chapters, provincial Estates, the Free Imperial Knights, and orders of chivalry. In fact, the entire corporate understanding of nobility in the society of Estates had come to rest on the pedigree and a noble with a non-noble mother was regarded as wanting.

The use as experimental sample of Mainz's knightly elect, rather than one of several of its post-revolutionary successor nobilities, inevitably puts change rather than continuity into the center of the picture. The remnants of the cathedral chapter took refuge in Aschaffenburg; the electoral seat

<sup>29</sup> Andreas Ludwig Veit, *Mainzer Domherren vom Ende des 16. bis zum Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts in Leben, Haus und Habe. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Kultur der Geistlichkeit* (Mainz: Kirchheim, 1924); Thomas J. Glas-Hochstettler, "The Imperial Knights in Post-Westphalian Mainz: A Case Study of Corporatism in the Old Reich," *Central European History* 11 (1978): 131–49; Friedrich Keinemann, "Das Domstift Mainz und der mediate Adel. Der Streit um die Zulassung von Angehörigen der landsässigen Ritterschaften zu Mainzer Dompräbenden," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 89 (1969): 153–70.

<sup>30</sup> Blanning, *Reform and Revolution in Mainz*; F. G. Dreyfus, *La Société urbaine et rhénane et particulièrement à Mayence dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle 1740–1792* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1968).

<sup>31</sup> Reif, *Adel im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, 30.