

## Introduction

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On 21 January 1793, a cold and foggy day, King Louis XVI of France was delivered to the guillotine on what is now the Place de la Concorde. More than 100,000 soldiers lined the snow-covered streets of Paris. The procession took almost two hours to cover the two miles from the Tour de Temple, where Louis had been imprisoned. On reaching the place of execution, the dethroned monarch stepped down from the carriage, took off his overcoat and unbuttoned his shirt collar. As the way up to the guillotine was slippery, he initially took the arm of his confessor, the Irish-born Abbé Henry Edgeworth, but he finished climbing the steps on his own. Sentenced to death by the National Convention for treason, the king turned from the scaffold towards the great crowds, averred his innocence and forgave his enemies. A drum roll ordered by General Antoine Santerre, the commander of the National Guard, drowned out his last words. The executioner seized the Bourbon king and forced him beneath the guillotine. The condemned man's broad neck did not sit well within the notch hollowed out in the executioner's block, and the decapitation turned out messy and very bloody. When, at last, the severed head was held up for the crowd to see, the dam broke for some spectators: a few onlookers sampled the blood that had spurted from the king's neck and argued over its flavour; others dipped their hands into it, and so many wanted to wet handkerchiefs or envelopes that in the end the executioner provided a bucket filled with blood. Nine months later, the king's widow, Marie Antoinette, was executed at the same spot. As the blade fell, again the cry went up: 'Long live the Republic!'<sup>1</sup>

From a monarchical point of view, the long nineteenth century, which stretched from the French Revolution to the end of the First World War, could hardly have started in more apocalyptic fashion. For many contemporaries and their successors, the legally sanctioned public execution of

<sup>1</sup> John Hardman, *Louis XVI* (New Haven, CT and London, 1993), pp. 231–233; J. M. Thompson (ed.), *English Witnesses of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1938), pp. 227–231; Henri Sanson, *Tagebücher der Henker von Paris*, vol. 1, [www.projekt-gutenberg.org/sanson/henker1/chap012.html](http://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/sanson/henker1/chap012.html) (accessed May 12, 2022).

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an anointed king was so outrageous an offence that it seemed to herald the definitive end of an ancient world order. News of Louis's beheading drove some distraught contemporaries into an emotional abyss. According to reports, it triggered suicides and cases of sudden insanity. Even in the twentieth century, the French philosopher and author Albert Camus still rued the execution of the king, which to him seemed to mark 'the irrevocable destruction of a world that, for a thousand years, had embraced a sacred order'. For Camus, on 21 January 1793 a moral code sanctioned by a transcendental God had been lost forever.<sup>2</sup>

In the light of this bloody start to the long nineteenth century, surely no member of the tightly knit network of Europe's ruling families would have dared to dream on that bleak winter's day of so colourful a monarchical spectacle as was mounted in Berlin and Braunschweig 120 years later. In the early summer of 1913 a magnificent gathering of the ruling dynasties of Europe took place in the German capital. The dignitaries could now appear before the lenses of film cameras, which preserved the festive moment in moving images for posterity to enjoy. The occasion was the wedding of Princess Viktoria Luise, the German emperor's only daughter, to Prince Ernst August of Cumberland, of the House of Guelf. The elite of Europe's monarchies were amongst the more than 1,000 guests: Tsar Nicholas II was happy to accept the invitation of Emperor Wilhelm II, his cousin by marriage, as was the British king, George V, who was also a cousin of the German ruler. Both led the young bride in a polonaise. The date of the celebration, 24 May, was a deliberate choice, for it was the birthday of British Queen Victoria, forebear of many of the illustrious guests, who had died in 1901. The wedding was intensely political, for it served to resolve the longstanding conflict between the Guelf and Hohenzollern dynasties initiated by the Prussian annexation of Hanover in 1866. Despite this backdrop, the marriage was successfully presented as an affair of the heart, and thousands of excited Berliners turned out to view the spectacle. Much to the infuriation of the socialist press, which was spitting tacks at the 'cheering rabble' filling the streets of the German capital during the lengthy festivities, the population of the city took a lively interest in the happy fortune of their 'little princess'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Susan Dunn, *The Deaths of Louis XVI: Regicide and the French Political Imagination* (Princeton, NJ, 1994), p. 140; Susan Dunn, 'Camus and Louis XVI: An Elegy for the Martyred King', *The French Review* 62 (1989), p. 1032.

<sup>3</sup> Hennig Holsten and Daniel Schönplüg, 'Widersprüche eines dynastischen Gipfeltreffens im Jahr 1913', in Ute Daniel und Christian K. Frey (eds.), *Die preußisch-welfische Hochzeit 1913. Das dynastische Europa in seinem letzten Friedensjahr* (Braunschweig, 2016), pp. 50–68; Jörg Kirschstein, 'Kaisertochter und Wolfenprinz. Die glanzvolle Hochzeit von Victoria Luise und Ernst August im Jahr 1913', in Stiftung

The royal wedding took place amid a bumper crop of splendid monarchical anniversaries: 1913 was not just the centenary of Napoleon's defeat at the Battle of Leipzig but also Wilhelm II's Silver Jubilee, marking twenty-five years since his accession to the German imperial throne. In addition to the Berlin nuptials, both these occasions were celebrated with great pomp. Eventually, in November 1913, greeted by the cheers of the population, the freshly married couple arrived in Brunswick, where Ernst Augustus ascended the throne of the duchy. More than four decades after the Kingdom of Hanover had ceased to exist, a Guelf prince returned to the German Empire as a ruling duke. 'You, ancient clan, shall always be renewed in the ranks of noble princes, just as at all times your people vow to you the ancient German fealty', read one commemorative postcard printed specially for this great day. 'The populace greeted us at the train stations, which had been decorated with flowers and with the blue and yellow colours of the land', Duchess Viktoria Luise would later recall. 'It was not just the inhabitants of the town who participated. From near and far more than 100,000 people had come ... all those who heard the rejoicing gained a sense of the power of tradition in the hearts of the people.'<sup>4</sup>

One hundred and thirty years earlier the French revolutionary Maximilien Robespierre had called out at the National Convention: 'Louis must die for the fatherland to live!' Yet in 1913 the monarchs of Europe could still bask in the warm glow of public approval, stage high politics as a family affair and tap into a dynastic loyalty beating deep in the hearts of the people. A broad monarchic seam ran through the nineteenth century and characterised that era in manifold ways. That phenomenon is the subject of this book.

The survival of the European monarchies in the nineteenth century seems all the more remarkable because this age is largely viewed as a period of accelerating, profound and often revolutionary change. This interpretation is reflected in the titles of the master narratives of the era. Eric Hobsbawm's classic trilogy identified a sequence of three epochs, with the age of revolution followed by the age of capital and then by the age of empire; in the volumes of the majestic history of Europe published by Propyläen, Eberhard Weis and Theodor Schieder identified first the 'breakthrough of the bourgeoisie' and then the establishment of the 'state

Residenzschloss Braunschweig (ed.), *Europas letztes Rendezvous. Die Hochzeit von Victoria Luise und Ernst August* (Braunschweig, 2013), pp. 14–55.

<sup>4</sup> Wulf Otte, 'Zwischen Welfenstolz und Preußenmacht. Die braunschweigische Thronfolgefrage 1866–1918', in Meike Buck, Maik Ohnezeit and Heike Pöppelmann (eds.), *1919 – Herrliche moderne Zeiten?* (Braunschweig, 2013), p. 52; Herzogin Viktoria Luise, *Ein Leben als Tochter des Kaisers* (Göttingen, 1965), pp. 118–119.

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system as global hegemon' as characteristic of the century. According to Jürgen Osterhammel's magnum opus this century witnessed nothing less than a 'transformation of the world'. And, indeed, the circumstances in which the people of Europe lived changed vastly over the course of the nineteenth century: accelerating industrialisation reached more and more areas of the continent; the growth of the population and the related migration from the countryside to the cities and beyond, out of Europe and overseas, were vast; communications and mobility were galvanised by rapid progress in both knowledge and technology; literacy rates grew rapidly, generating a broader public sphere; increasingly larger groups within the population benefited from the introduction of constitutions and the step-by-step expansion of the franchise; new horizons opened up as a number of European powers extended an imperial grip across the rest of the world.<sup>5</sup>

Despite all these changes, Europe remained a profoundly monarchical continent during this era. Every new European state established in the nineteenth century entered independence with a crowned head, from Greece (1821) and Belgium (1830) to Bulgaria (1878) and Norway (1905). When the nations of Europe went to war in 1914, the continent was still overwhelmingly monarchical. France, Switzerland, Portugal and tiny San Marino were the few republican exceptions that proved the monarchical rule.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, anti-monarchical movements were active in several states, and individual rulers were subject to sharp, and sometimes vitriolic, public criticism. Moreover, a number of crowned heads – amongst them Tsar Alexander II, Empress Elisabeth of Austria and King Umberto I of Italy – fell victim to a wave of nihilistic assassinations at the turn of the century. But there was no significant broad anti-monarchical current. On the contrary, the monarchical regimes – in the various forms that they had taken on in the decades since 1793 – continued to be widely accepted. Sometimes they were even downright popular in this new age of radio sets, airplanes, X-ray machines and Charlie Chaplin films. Self-congratulatory references to the 'power of tradition in the hearts of the people' were not entirely fanciful.

The appeal of exploring the monarchical dimension of the age lies precisely in that contrast between the profound transformation of

<sup>5</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789–1848* (London, 1962); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848–1875* (London, 1975); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914* (London, 1987); Eberhard Weis, *Der Durchbruch des Bürgertums. 1776–1847* (Berlin, 1990); Theodor Schieder, *Staatensystem als Vormacht der Welt, 1848–1918* (Berlin, 1986); Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Dieter Langewiesche, *Die Monarchie im Jahrhundert Europas. Selbstbehauptung durch Wandel im 19. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg, 2013), p. 6.

Europe and the seemingly improbable tenacity of the monarchical order. In Arthur Conan Doyle's short story *Silver Blaze*, master detective Sherlock Holmes has to direct the attention of a dim-witted policeman to the 'curious incident' that, on the night in question, the guard dog did not raise the alarm. Therein lay the key to catching the wrongdoer. This admonition to pay attention to what did *not* happen although it could have been expected also impels us here: regardless of the shocking symbolism of 21 January 1793 and despite the monumental political, social, economic and cultural changes that followed, monarchy did not die out in nineteenth-century Europe. The period that the American historian Robert Roswell Palmer named the 'Age of the Democratic Revolution' did not lead to an era of republicanism.<sup>7</sup> Even the next great wave of revolutions, which swept Europe in 1848–1849, hardly thinned out the ranks of the continent's monarchs. The underlying theme of this book is the 'curious incident' that in the course of the long nineteenth century, which followed the French Revolution, the monarchies of Europe did *not* disappear. At the heart of our story lies the remarkable manifestation of tenacity, transformation and survival that made the celebrations of 1913 possible.

This book depicts and analyses Europe's monarchical nineteenth century. It asks what made the late flowering of European royalty possible and how this unfolding came about. How did the dynasties and their supporters manage to safeguard a form of government in which the head of state routinely inherited that office for life? Its survival was surely not a simple matter. It happened in the midst of the rapid change that devoured so many elements of the Ancien Régime and in the face of the challenges posed by a post-revolutionary age that insisted on greater popular participation in the exercise of power, on the dismantling of privilege and on extensive civil liberties. What was the nature of the transformation of the princely system which enabled, in the words of Dieter Langewiesche, monarchy's 'self-assertion in the nineteenth century'?<sup>8</sup>

For a long time historians failed to give due attention to the monarchical dimension of this age. The topic seemed too nostalgic, too

<sup>7</sup> Robert R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ, 1959 and 1964).

<sup>8</sup> For the sake of completeness, we must also acknowledge that in a few instances – the Vatican, the Holy Roman Empire before 1806, Poland-Lithuania until 1795 – there existed monarchical systems in which the head of state was determined not by birth but by the decision of an exclusive electoral college. See Tobias Friske, *Staatsform Monarchie. Was unterscheidet eine Monarchie heute noch von einer Republik?* (Freiburg, 2007), pp. 40–44, <https://freidok.uni-freiburg.de/data/3325> (accessed 10 August 2017); Langewiesche, *Die Monarchie*.

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apologetic or too reactionary, and even when they did address it, they often approached it with insufficient analytical rigour. In 1989, the British historian David Cannadine, one of the fathers of modern monarchical history, complained about ‘too much chronicle and too little history, a surfeit of myth-making and a dearth of scholarly scepticism’. The situation has changed decisively over recent years, and outstanding studies have taught us a great deal about the development of European monarchy during the nineteenth century. Scholarly interest has focused, on the one hand, on royal public-relations activities, analysing media, self-representation and communications, and, on the other hand, on the development and capacities of the constitutional-monarchical system. Beyond these two broad themes, a clearer picture of the monarchical century has emerged from numerous new biographies of the rulers themselves. The leading lights of the monarchical scene, figures such as Queen Victoria of Great Britain, King Ludwig II of Bavaria, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and the bombastic and mercurial Emperor Wilhelm II, have all been the subjects of numerous biographies.<sup>9</sup>

This study adopts a new perspective to help to shed light on the ability of European monarchy to adapt and survive. Its focus is on the royal heirs. These individuals, the many men and few women at the heart of this story, were essential to the survival of hereditary monarchy. The future of their dynasties depended upon the heirs to the throne. Great importance was attributed to these august figures from the very moment of their birth, an event that naturally attracted great attention.

One such child was born in Laxenburg near Vienna on 21 August 1858. He was at the centre of attention from the moment he took his first breath.

<sup>9</sup> David Cannadine, ‘The Last Hanoverian Sovereign? The Victorian Monarchy in Historical Perspective, 1688–1888’, in A. L. Beier, David Cannadine and James M. Rosenheim (eds.), *The First Modern Society: Essays in English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 129–130; a short overview of published research on the history of monarchy in Europe can be found in Frank Lorenz Müller, ‘Stabilizing a “Great Historical System” in the Nineteenth Century? Royal Heirs and Succession in an Age of Monarchy’, in Frank Lorenz Müller and Heidi Mehrkens (eds.), *Sons and Heirs: Succession and Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Basingstoke, 2015), pp. 1–16; Martin Kohlrausch, ‘Die höfische Gesellschaft und ihre Feinde. Monarchie und Öffentlichkeit in Großbritannien und Deutschland um 1900’, *Neue Politische Literatur* 47 (2002), pp. 450–466; and Torsten Rlotte, ‘Nach “Pomp und Politik”. Neue Ansätze in der Historiographie zum regierenden Hochadel im 19. Jahrhundert’, *Neue Politische Literatur* 59 (2014), pp. 209–228; on the (self-)representation of the German monarchy in the second half of the nineteenth century see also Anja Schöbel, *Monarchie und Öffentlichkeit. Die Inszenierung der deutschen Bundesfürsten 1848–1918* (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 2017). A Europe-wide approach to the role of the monarchy in the nineteenth century can be found in Benjamin Hasselhorn und Marc von Knorring (eds.), *Vom Olymp zum Boulevard. Die europäischen Monarchien von 1815 bis heute – Verlierer der Geschichte?* (Berlin, 2018).



Figure 1. ‘The Emperor’s Pride – The Hope of His Peoples’: a contemporary print portrays the baptism of the Austrian Crown Prince Rudolf in 1858 as an ethereal act, surrounded by saints and ancestors, transcending the centuries. Johann Schickl, *Baptism of Rudolf, Crown Prince of Austria, 1858* [*Taufe von Rudolf, Kronprinz von Österreich, 1858*], ÖNB Bildarchiv und Grafiksammlung, Sign. Pk 3001, 270.

‘The Pride of the Emperor – The Hope of His Peoples’ read the title of a ‘pamphlet to commemorate Austria’s happy day’, here shown as Figure 1. Garlanded with all the insignia of power and majesty, it portrayed the baptism of Crown Prince Rudolf (1858–1889) by Cardinal Josef Rauscher at Laxenburg Castle on 23 August 1858. At the centre of the depiction is the two-day-old infant boy, held above the baptismal font by his father, Emperor Franz Joseph (1830–1916), while the cardinal administers the sacrament. The scene is framed by pillars mounted with busts of Emperor Rudolf I (1218–1291) and Empress Maria Theresa (1717–1780), great ancestral figures of the House of Habsburg. Additionally, the baby, the emperor and the cardinal are surrounded by the patron saints of the Austrian Crown lands, numerous additional

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dignitaries, and – somewhat unexpectedly – a lion, who looks on genially. The three crowns that the child was born to wear – the imperial crown of Austria and the royal crowns of Hungary and Bohemia – are displayed for the onlookers on a cushion at the base of the font. Many similar images were crafted at the time of the birth of this heir to the throne. Bearing the title ‘The Habsburgs’ Youngest Flowering’ (*Habsburgs jüngste Blüte*), a lithograph by Eduard Kaiser showed the new-born child in a crib decorated with a personification of Austria. A coloured chalk lithograph with the title ‘The most illustrious imperial family with his Serene Highness Crown Prince Rudolf Carl Josef’ depicts the heir to the throne’s small bed below a commanding image of Rudolf I and a trumpet-blowing angel, who gestures towards the child. Joseph Kohn’s *Crown Jewel for the Habsburg Dynasty*, a ‘festive album’ published in Lemberg in 1858, ‘on the occasion of the happy birth of his Imperial and Royal Highness the most august Crown Prince Rudolf’, provided its reader with a full thirty-five pages of loyal imperial edification.<sup>10</sup>

The baroque-like splendour of such propaganda images and the glorifying texts that explained them are an indication that securing the succession – the transfer of monarchical rule from one individual to that individual’s successor, usually from one generation to the next – continued to place high demands on dynastic systems. With the principle of inheritance remaining a core element of European monarchical rule, royal heirs were essential to the system. Additionally, they provided the monarchies, whose future they embodied, with a unique political resource that proved particularly valuable in the nineteenth century. Someday in the future they would serve as the next generation of ruler, but they already existed in the present, in a visible, directly communicable and malleable form, years and even decades before they would come to power. Within monarchical systems, royal heirs formed a flesh-and-blood medium that prepared and heralded the future of the dynasty, one that could be fashioned according to the needs and inclinations of the relevant elements of the population.

Heirs to the throne personified a message about the fundamental continuity of monarchical rule – precisely that reassuring and awe-inspiring steadfastness of tradition that was emphasised by Rudolf I, the founding father of the Habsburg dynasty, gazing down on his descendent and namesake, born 650 years later. At the same time, however, they were a sign that, in accordance with the law of nature, change at the head of the system was inevitable. While the men and women who were predestined

<sup>10</sup> Werner Telesko, *Geschichtsraum Österreich. Die Habsburger und ihre Geschichte in der bildenden Kunst des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna, 2006), pp. 282–286.



to wear the crown one day were certainly influenced by their ancestry and by their dynastic and courtly surroundings, they were more than just products of traditional influences. Future rulers needed to be able to react to the political, medial, cultural and constitutional dynamics of their present. Additionally, they served as a screen onto which the people could project their hopes, all the more so when their media presence was growing. During times of rapid change, the people's wish for a better future was often all the more accompanied by a need for familiar continuity. Royal heirs promised both.

The role of future ruler was not determined by longstanding convention alone. It was also shaped by new factors such as the introduction of constitutions and demands for greater participation from a constantly growing public. Increasingly, therefore, heirs to the throne had to live in the public eye, where the statesman-like qualities and social graces of the future ruler could be scrutinised. What the future under the ruling dynasty might hold could be divined from whether the next-in-line appeared industrious or feckless, morally upright or debauched, well-equipped or overwhelmed, committed or lacklustre, whether he was decried as a lecherous skirt-chaser or admired as a loving husband and father. We have good reason, then, to explore the experiences, depictions, performances and functions of the future monarchs precisely in the years they spent under the public spotlight preparing themselves for the office of ruler. They did so in a multiplicity of roles: as tender infants, as hardworking schoolchildren, as devoted parents, as world travellers, as parliamentarians, as guardians of the constitution, as dashing soldiers and as patrons of culture and learning.

A lens focused on royal heirs can also capture the monarchical century as a whole. Their biographies illustrate both what remained unaltered and what did change: the royal houses' adaptation to the supposedly bourgeois lifestyle of the many is just as evident as their efforts to preserve the magic and remain at heart proudly different and unique. The peoples of the European monarchies on which we concentrate here were experiencing rapid social, political, medial, cultural and economic modernisation. In response to the resulting challenges, monarchies from Spain to Sweden and from the Netherlands to Greece sooner or later moved to a form of constitutional rule. This constitutionalisation was the most significant shared characteristic of the monarchies of Europe. According to the constitutional historian Martin Kirsch, it was this step that allowed 'monarchical constitutionalism' to prevail across the continent.<sup>11</sup> Amongst the

<sup>11</sup> Martin Kirsch, *Monarch und Parlament im 19. Jahrhundert. Der monarchische Konstitutionalismus als europäischer Verfassungstyp – Frankreich im Vergleich* (Göttingen, 1999).

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larger European states only two held out against this trend. Initially, at least, the monarchies of Russia and the Ottoman Empire on the eastern edge of Europe resisted the effects of post-revolutionary modernisation. Russia's Romanovs succeeded in maintaining their autocratic form of rule largely undiminished until 1905, and in significant respects even beyond that date. Similarly, after the suspension of the short-lived constitution of 1876, the Turkish sultans were able to delay the constitutional age until the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. These two singular cases are omitted here.

Although this book seeks to provide a panoramic European perspective, it makes no claim to be encyclopaedic. The monarchies and their heirs in this era were too numerous for every single ruling dynasty and every heir to the throne even to be mentioned, let alone treated in detail. Instead its central themes are illustrated using examples of dynasties, individuals, developments and events drawn from more than a dozen European monarchies. While this study is principally concerned with the monarchical systems in Great Britain, the German lands, Austria and Italy, it also considers the monarchies in Spain, Greece, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Scandinavia. The colourful and arresting biographies of the heirs discussed here are tied into larger contexts and broader developments. These future rulers were significant and revealing components of a system of rule, but their individual human fates must not disappear behind an analysis of their functions.

Whether specific heirs to the throne were able, and indeed willing, to fulfil the onerous duties they had been assigned at birth and how they went about doing so depended on numerous factors. Happenstance was just as significant as individual preference or aptitude. With all the variety of human character in play here, we cannot expect each instance to follow the same pattern. Nor did the monarchical actors of the nineteenth century all speak from a single script. Repeatedly, exceptions broke – and proved – the rules of a broader development. Nevertheless, it is important that we first sketch the essential features of the world in which most heirs in the constitutional monarchies of nineteenth-century Europe claimed and performed their roles.