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Derek McKay. *The Great Elector: Frederick William of Brandenburg-Prussia.* Harlow: Longman, 2001. xiii + 286 pp. $13.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-582-49482-4.

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German nationalist historians have long celebrated the seventeenth-century "Great Elector," Frederick William, for establishing the Hohenzollern dynasty and, allegedly, setting the course for Prussia's unification of Germany. Yet this Brandenburg ruler was dubbed the "Great Elector" already during his long reign from 1640 to 1688, and the jurist Pufendorf reinforced the nickname by publishing a biography with the same title. Derek McKay's erudite yet concise biography avoids the hagiography of Frederick William's later admirers and offers instead a compelling account of how the ruler earned this epithet. In addition to creating a standing army and defeating the territorial estates of Brandenburg and Prussia, Frederick William established himself as a sovereign–if petty–European prince by consolidating his rule over a composite state of non-contiguous territories.

When Frederick William succeeded as Elector in 1640, he faced a series of daunting geo-political challenges. Until the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, Brandenburg remained a battleground for Swedish, Imperial, and Polish troops, whose marauding left the Hohenzollern territories among those most severely affected by the Thirty Years' War (pp. 49-52). This conflict also conditioned Frederick William's increasingly pragmatic approaches to treaty arrangements in future wars, which entailed skillful jockeying between powerful and dangerous neighbors. A standing army, organized in the early 1650s, had a peacetime mobilization of over 20,000 by the end of Frederick William's reign. The Elector also established a formal sovereignty, first with his independence from the Holy Roman Emperor as ruler of Brandenburg (according to the terms of Westphalia), and then by prising his Prussian Duchy from the suzerainty of the Polish King at the end of the War of the North in 1660 (p. 104).

The independence of the Prussian Duchy had an additional effect of weakening the Prussian territorial estates, which had traditionally called on the Polish King to mediate their conflicts with the Elector. After the last Prussian Diet was finally dissolved in 1671, Frederick William could more easily levy unauthorized taxes or impose other unpopular fiscal policies (pp. 142-143). Similarly, the Elector defeated the Brandenburg estates, which yielded to his demands by the 1660s (p. 131). These elements of absolutist governance not only increased state revenues but also allowed Frederick William to begin to centralize his control over the disparate Hohenzollern territories, which reached from the Baltic to the lower Rhine. The "Great Elector" enjoyed less success, however, in his efforts to expand those territories. Juelich and Berg (flanking the Archbishopric of Cologne) remained outside Hohenzollern grasp, despite the initia-

tion of two wars, the second of which was derisively nick-named the "Cow War" (pp. 82-84). And Western Pomerania remained a Swedish territory, even after Frederick William's successful occupation in the 1670s (pp. 225-226).

It was in matters of religion that Frederick William's pragmatic absolutism departed most clearly from continental models. As a devout Calvinist, Frederick William (whose grandfather, Elector John Sigismund, had converted in 1617) faced the enmity and resistance of a predominantly Lutheran populace with an arch-conservative clergy. This limited the Elector's latitude, at least initially, although Westphalia's recognition of Calvinism in 1648 provided much needed political cover. Although McKay dismisses historiography that attributes the success of the "Great Elector" and the Hohenzollern, more generally, to Calvinism, he does recognize a certain confessional influence (p. 148). Because the family sought marital alliances with other prominent Calvinists, according to McKay, "[t]he dynasty began to mix with another more cosmopolitan and commercially minded world," shaping, in turn, the Hohenzollern's noted religious toleration (p. 153). This pluralism also supported a successful policy of encouraging migration to Brandenburg-Prussia, inaugurated by Frederick William, which was facilitated by the French Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 (pp. 184-187).

In McKay's straightforward biography, the "Great Elector" epithet, bestowed already by Frederick William's contemporaries, reflected the accomplishments of a successful and particularly lengthy political tenure. Perhaps the only shortcoming in McKay's approach is a tendency to ignore the older historiography. Yet this strategy also facilitates McKay's sober and lucid analysis, which is ultimately the best antidote to nationalist teleology.

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