



***Royal Heirs: Succession and the  
Future of Monarchy in Nineteenth-  
Century Europe***

**By Frank Lorenz Müller**

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“The house of Hanover, like ducks, produce bad parents,” Owen Morshead, a former Royal Librarian (1926-1958), once observed: “They trample on their young.” The, at times, dysfunctional family relationships that take shape behind the walls of Europe’s royal residences are just one aspect that Frank Lorenz Müller investigates in his exciting study on the continent’s nineteenth-century royal heirs. As one of the series editors for the Palgrave Studies in Modern Monarchy series, the author of a monograph on the German Emperor Frederick III, and co-editor of *Royal Heirs and the Uses of Soft Power in Nineteenth Century Europe* (2016), to name a few, Müller is well placed to take on this complex task.

While English readers have had to wait three years for the translation from German of *Royal Heirs*, it has been worth the wait. Approaching the subject from a European perspective and taking as the timeframe the ‘long’ nineteenth century (the period between the French Revolution and the end of the First World War), Müller examines various themes that range from education, constitutions, the press, and the militarisation of the monarchy.

Müller begins the project with a concise introduction that sets the scene. He observes that for too long historians have dismissed the monarchical dimension of the nineteenth century and, “even when they did address it, they often approached it with insufficient analytical rigour” (6), something Müller has more than rectified. What makes Müller’s study fresh is that the lens is focused on the children who embodied the institutions’ future and not, as is usually the case, the monarchs themselves. The individuals at the heart of this study are “principally concerned with the monarchical systems in Great Britain, the German lands, Austria and Italy,” although Müller even “considers the monarchies in Spain, Greece, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Scandinavia” (10).

The first chapter looks at “four concentric circles” that relate to “the expectations and tensions generated by the task assigned to” the royal heirs (51). These include, to name two, the rulebooks of the ruling family and the royal court. Müller explains how these features of the monarchical landscape “dictated how the representatives of the next generation of rulers had to act and how they might contribute to the future of the

monarchy” (51). In the section on the royal house, for instance, the author fascinatingly reveals the authority the sovereign exercised over his family. Royal authority that stretched from “oversight of their education, confirmation of their wardship” and even “approval of their travel” (36). While the monarch’s familial power has already been brought to light in popular history biographies such as Hannah Pakula’s *An Uncommon Woman* (1995), Müller’s research has also focused also on the implications this had for the monarchical institution and not simply the personal.

The second chapter looks at royal heirs as sons and husbands. The first half of this chapter looks at the troublesome relationships between three heirs and their predecessors: the ill-fated Prussian-German Crown Prince Friederich Wilhelm; the playboy British heir to the throne, Bertie, and his domestic tyrant of a mother Queen Victoria; and Crown Prince Rudolf, the only son of the long reigning Austrian emperor Franz Joseph. Although the poor relationships between monarch and heir that Müller described may not surprise those who have read, for instance, Jane Ridley’s enthralling biography on the future Edward VII, this study has drawn other interpretations. Yes, it is well known that the three case studies here “denied their sons the opportunity to prepare themselves for their future office under their own initiative and with access to information” (78). But Müller takes this further when he argues that “because their predecessors had kept them isolated,” this had the advantage of ensuring that “the new rulers were not identified with the old monarchs, which could prove invigorating” and in fact “prevented the system from becoming entirely inelastic” (78–79). The second half focuses on princes as husbands and seeks to address questions such as, “what opportunities could the monarchical system of the nineteenth century derive from the marriages of future rulers, and what risks were run?” (82). To provide answers, Müller again focuses on three royal heirs, this time the Italian Crown Prince Umberto, Prince Wilhelm of Württemberg, and the Saxon Friedrich August. Here, when discussing, for instance, the story of the fleeing pregnant Crown Princess of Saxony from “her bleak marriage to a stupid and bigoted Philistine” (99) in late 1902, Müller’s superb analysis and highly entertaining writing style grips the reader.

Education is the theme of Chapter Three and after discussing “Training Princes in Constitutional Monarchies” (113), Müller hones in on two ruling dynasties: the education of four British heirs: Victoria, Edward VII, George V and Edward VIII, and three Prussian heirs: Friedrich III, Wilhelm II and Crown Prince Wilhelm, during the nineteenth century. What the author has excitedly shown is that raising future rulers was no longer something that could be achieved in isolation. But rather the education of those destined to wear the

crown “was a source of excellent publicity” and princely upbringing allowed a message to be reinforced about the monarchy’s “own membership of bourgeois society” (174).

Chapter Four shifts attention to politics, the press, and the public sphere and looks at issues such as future rulers as agents of opposition; the politics of the media and the political mass market; and royal heirs and soft power. Müller points out that, as representatives of the future, “the crown sought to narrate a compelling story, which the next generation almost inevitably embodied” (209). And one method of doing this was via visibility and the media. Due to their youthfulness, the future rulers were not included in the exercise of royal power, yet through images displayed to the public the royal heirs “could use the media of the political mass market to popularise monarchical rule, to demonstrate new relevance for an old institution and to supplement the ruler’s instruments of power” (209).

The final chapter addresses “the part played by Europe’s royal heirs in the militarisation of the monarchy” (245). It considers heirs on the military stage, the portrayal of crown princes as war heroes and future rulers as soldiers in the Great War. Focusing on the latter, Müller charts the differing World War One experiences of Britain’s future Edward VIII, Prussia’s Crown Prince Wilhelm, and the Bavarian Rupprecht. While Philip Zielger showed in his biography of the future Duke of Windsor that the prince was frustrated at not being allowed to share in the dangers of fellow soldiers, at least unlike his Prussian cousin, Prince Wilhelm, he did not have to contend with the memory of a deceased grandfather, Friederich III, who “advanced from crown prince to war hero” (303).

Although some of the witty anecdotes presented in this study will not be entirely new to some, Müller’s rigorous analysis and insightful interpretations will be. This is a beautifully written study that is underpinned by thorough research in various national and regional archives. Dealing with a cast of fascinating royal and imperial characters—some young and others not quite in the first flush of youth—Müller’s highly readable account adds a much-needed layer to the flourishing literature on royal history by artfully explaining how these future rulers contributed to the survival of crowns they were born to wear.

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