

German Historical Institute London Bulletin

Bd. 27

2005

Nr. 1

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*FROM KING TO FÜHRER: THE GERMAN ARISTOCRACY AND THE NAZI MOVEMENT**

by Stephan Malinowski

A summary execution in the courtyard of the German High Command on the night of 21 July 1944 has entered the history books in a number of versions. The story encountered most often in the literature reads as follows: in order to execute Count Claus von Stauffenberg, the firing squad had to shoot twice. At the moment of the first order to fire, Stauffenberg's adjutant, Werner von Haeften, dramatically hurled himself in front of Stauffenberg and took the bullets with his own body. Before Stauffenberg was killed by the second volley, he stood up straight and called out: 'Long live Secret Germany!' The bodies were buried in a cemetery in Berlin-Schöneberg, only to be dug up again shortly afterwards on Himmler's orders. They were burned and the ashes cast to the winds.

This scene, so rich in symbolism, typifies the alleged incompatibility between aristocracy and National Socialism. In this version of events, for example, the Nazi death machine was shown as being under the command of a bourgeois general, Fritz Fromm, who acted in a manner which was spineless and cowardly. His noble victims, by contrast, represented the peak of perfection of the aristocratic ideal of *Haltung* ('bearing' or 'a stiff upper lip'). Then there is the lily-livered hatred with which the petty bourgeois and neo-aristocratic prophet, Heinrich Himmler, persecuted these victims beyond the grave. And, finally, the impressive contribution of the aristocracy to the events of 20 July – about 45 per cent of the conspirators were members of the aristocracy¹ – and the long list of aristocratic names among the vic-

*This article is based on a lecture given at the GHIL on 18 November 2003.

¹ According to figures in Romedio Galeazzo Graf von Thun-Hohenstein,

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tims of the ensuing retribution, reinforced the image of noble steadfastness. The aristocracy made up about a third of the victims of retaliation—men of the resistance who had led the most promising attempt to get rid of the Nazi regime, freely sacrificing their lives in the process. Their names are known not only to historians. Since the 1950s, a long tradition of historiography, journalism, and commemorative speeches has counted these men among ‘the noblest and greatest that human history has ever seen’.²

This image is tempered somewhat by the second association which always arises in discussions of the influence of the aristocracy after 1918, when we once again encounter von Papen and his followers, those five to ten figures, ‘unforeseen by the Constitution’, who negotiated the transfer of power from the aged Field Marshal von Hindenburg to the Nazi regime in January 1933.

As far as the aristocracy is concerned, it is no exaggeration to say that both between and beyond these two extremes there lies an area which historians have generally glossed over and rarely examined in depth. Every account of January 1933 mentions the conservative élites. However, so far much has been claimed, but little substantiated, about the aristocracy after 1918.³ While this situation has clearly

‘Wehrmacht und Widerstand’, in D. H. Poppel *et al.* (eds.), *Die Soldaten der Wehrmacht* (Munich, 1998), pp. 62–123, at p. 113.

² Chancellor Helmut Kohl, making a (historically incorrect) reference to Winston Churchill, ‘Justitia fundamentum regnorum’, speech given on 20 July 1994 in Berlin, published in *Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand* (ed.), *Der 20. Juli 1944: Reden zu einem Tag der deutschen Geschichte* (Berlin, 1984), quotation at p. 215. On the history of the reception of 20 July see Jürgen Danyel, ‘Der 20. Juli’, in Etienne François and Hagen Schulze (eds.), *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, 3 vols. (Munich, 2001), ii. pp. 220–37 and Peter Steinbach, *Widerstand im Widerstreit: Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus in der Erinnerung der Deutschen* (Paderborn, 1994). See also the bibliographical essay by Ulrich Heinemann, ‘Arbeit am Mythos: Neuere Literatur zum bürgerlich-aristokratischen Widerstand gegen Hitler und zum 20. Juli 1944 (Teil I)’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 21 (1995), pp. 111–39, and id. and Michael Krüger-Charlé, ‘Arbeit am Mythos: Der 20. Juli 1944 in Publizistik und wissenschaftlicher Literatur des Jubiläumsjahres 1994 (Teil II)’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 23 (1997), pp. 475–501.

³ Among the older literature, the following titles deserve mention: Walter Görllitz, *Die Junker: Adel und Bauer im deutschen Osten* (Limburg a. d. Lahn, 4th edn. 1981; first published 1956), esp. pp. 326–410; the pioneering essays by

begun to change over the last ten years,⁴ it is interesting to note that when writing about the Weimar Republic, historians seldom depict the aristocracy as an analytical category in its own right, even though it is omnipresent in theories concerning the Republic's destruction. Although the aristocracy's inner dynamics after 1918 have not been examined deeply, in light of 1933 most scholars would agree that it is impossible to discuss the seizure of power without mentioning the Junkers. No one from the 'old power élite', Heinrich August Winkler has said, 'worked as early, contributed as actively, and as successfully, toward the destruction of Weimar democracy, as the East Elbian Junkers'.⁵ The terminology chosen here illustrates that scholars have focused on a small and, even after 1918, immensely influential aris-

George Kleine, 'Adelsgenossenschaft und Nationalsozialismus', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 26 (1978), pp. 100–43, and Karl-Otmar Freiherr von Aretin, 'Der bayerische Adel: Von der Monarchie zum Dritten Reich', in Martin Broszat, Elke Fröhlich, et al. (eds.), *Bayern in der NS-Zeit*, 6 vols. (Munich, 1977–83), iii. pp. 513–67.

⁴ Of the more recent literature see esp. Iris Freifrau von Hoyningen-Huene, *Adel in der Weimarer Republik* (Limburg, 1992); Shelly Baranowski, *The Sanctity of Rural Life: Nobility, Protestantism and Nazism in Weimar Prussia* (New York, 1995); Rainer Pomp, 'Brandenburgischer Landadel und die Weimarer Republik: Konflikte um Oppositionsstrategien und Elitenkonzepte', in Kurt Adamy and Kristina Hübinger (eds.), *Adel und Staatsverwaltung in Brandenburg im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Ein historischer Vergleich* (Berlin, 1996), pp. 185–216; Larry Eugene Jones, 'Catholic Conservatives in the Weimar Republic: The Politics of the Rhenish–Westphalian Aristocracy, 1918–1933', *German History*, 18 (2000), pp. 60–85; Eckart Conze, *Von deutschem Adel: Die Grafen von Bernstorff im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 2000); Heinz Reif (ed.), *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland*, vol. 2: *Entwicklungslinien und Wendepunkte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2001); Eckart Conze and Monika Wienfort (eds.), *Adel und Moderne: Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, 2004); Marcus Funck, *Feudales Kriegertum und militärische Professionalität: Der Adel im preußisch-deutschen Offizierkorps 1860–1933/34* (Berlin, 2005); and the book on which this article is based, Stephan Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer: Deutscher Adel und Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 2004; first published 2003).

⁵ Heinrich August Winkler, 'Requiem für eine Republik: Zum Problem der Verantwortung für das Scheitern der ersten deutschen Demokratie', in Peter Steinbach and Johannes Tuchel (eds.), *Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Bonn, 1994), pp. 54–67, at p. 57.

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tocratic faction called 'the Junkers', the 'pre-industrial power élite', or the 'agrarians'. However, these categories do not describe 'the aristocracy' as such. The Hindenburg camarilla, which is always mentioned in this context, refers to a group of ten to twelve men,⁶ a circle which grows to a few hundred if aristocrats who played important roles in the *Reichslandbund*, the German National People's Party (DNVP), the *Stahlhelm*, and similar organizations, are included.⁷ The early and fateful alliance between these groups and the Nazi movement is known and undisputed.

This article, therefore, will not deal with this minority and its relatively well-researched organizations. Instead, I will examine the aristocracy and its associations as a whole, and, in particular, the rapidly growing group of the 'aristocratic proletariat' (I). I shall then outline the main similarities and differences between the old aristocracy and the Nazi movement (II), and go on to make a few comments on the scope of aristocratic convergence with National Socialism, and on how this has been interpreted (III), before concluding briefly (IV).

This essay is limited to the period up to 1934, when the Nazi state, newly consolidated by means of the 'long knives', brought the 'second revolution' to a halt and silenced the Conservative Revolution. Apart from individual aristocrats who took part in the Conservative Revolution, there was, in my opinion, no movement of opposition to Nazism to which the aristocracy as a whole contributed after this date. The major aristocratic associations and the new aristocratic-bourgeois foundations of the Weimar period had completed their voluntary alignment with National Socialism (*Selbstgleichschaltung*) by 1933-4, and any organizational remnants and personal networks

⁶ The smallest details of the political equivocations of this circle are well known. See esp. Heinrich August Winkler, *Weimar 1918-1933: Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie* (Munich, 1993), pp. 477-594 and, taking a strongly personalized view, Henry Ashby Turner, *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power: January 1933* (London, 1996).

⁷ First, Hans-Jürgen Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preußischer Konservatismus im Wilhelminischen Reich (1893-1914): Ein Beitrag zur Analyse des Nationalismus in Deutschland am Beispiel des Bundes der Landwirte und der Deutsch-Konservativen Partei* (Hanover, 1966). And most recently, Stephanie Merkenich, *Grüne Front gegen Weimar: Reichs-Landbund und agrarischer Lobbyismus 1918-1933* (Düsseldorf, 1998).

of élitist opposition in which the aristocracy played a prominent part were violently destroyed on 30 June 1934.⁸

I On the Heterogeneity of the German Aristocracy

During the Weimar period the aristocracy was no longer limited to a small circle of influential large landowners, Reichswehr officers, and district administrative officials. In the 1920s the aristocracy as a whole numbered some 90,000 people, representing between 0.1 and 0.2 per cent of the German population. It was a highly complex group, heterogeneous in terms of region, denomination, and legal and, especially, social status.

Historians so far have, understandably, concentrated on the successful sections of this group. However, this perspective tends to distort our understanding of a phenomenon which should, in fact, be the starting point for any study of the aristocracy after the First World War. For the aristocracy as a whole, 1918 brought decline more dramatic than for any other social group. Of the 10,000 noble officers of the Imperial Army, no more than 900 found a position in the Reichswehr.⁹ There was no professional replacement for the ruined old-boy networks of the aristocracy in state service, or for the vanished princely courts and cadet schools – at least none which the aristocracy was prepared to accept. After 1918 the notorious East Elbian landed aristocracy's estates were still large enough to serve as weapons depots for demobilized Freikorps units and meeting places for anti-democratic discussion circles, and to provide modest homes for unmarried women in the 'spinster wing'.¹⁰ But the majority of these estates were no longer profitable enough to provide disorientated younger sons and daughters with a living.

⁸ Larry E. Jones, 'The Limits of Collaboration: Edgar Jung, Herbert von Bose and the Origins of the Conservative Resistance to Hitler, 1933–34', in id. and James Retallack (eds.), *Between Reform, Reaction and Resistance: Studies in the History of German Conservatism from 1789 to 1945* (Providence, 1993), pp. 465–502.

⁹ Funck, *Feudales Kriegertum und militärische Professionalität*, now provides a detailed analysis of the aristocracy and the military.

¹⁰ Aristocratic designation for the rooms in which unmarried female members of the family who were not gainfully employed were accommodated.

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This group of impoverished and socially degraded petty nobles which, in the 1920s, expanded to number several thousands, shook up the class consciousness of the entire aristocracy.¹¹ After 1918 the social dynamics of this group troubled noble families, family associations, and the large aristocratic associations at various levels. This is why any political and social history of the aristocracy after 1918 which concentrates on the diverse functional élites (especially in the Reichswehr, the higher civil service, and among large landholders) which managed to preserve their status at this period misses the point entirely. Instead, evidence shows that the process of the aristocracy's political radicalization can be adequately described only if the dynamic loser groups are included as well. Even within the high aristocracy, which generally continued to concentrate great wealth in the hands of its (male) patriarchs,¹² the social trajectories of individual younger sons plummeted. The young princes who, after the war, ended up earning their bread in auto repair shops and insurance offices, and, finally, serving in the SA and becoming members of the Nazi Party in the 1920s and 1930s, were not anomalies, but represented a distinct social type in their own right.¹³

A closer look at aristocratic organizations reveals an astonishing degree of social degradation which the aid organizations could only symbolically assuage with pitiful support funds and donations of

¹¹ Erwein Freiherr von Aretin, 'Adel und Krone', in id. (ed.), *Erster Rundbrief an den jungen Adel Bayerns* (1923), Archiv der Fürsten Öttingen-Wallerstein, VIII, 19c 1, no. 117.

¹² In the 1920s the *Deutsche Adelsgenossenschaft* (DAG, German League of Aristocrats) had members who were unable to pay their annual subscriptions of 6 Marks, while during the same period, the annual apanages of the hereditary prince Franz Joseph von Thurn und Taxis amounted to about 80,000 Marks. Archiv der Fürsten Thurn und Taxis (Regensburg), HMA, nos. 3596 and 3597. On poverty among the petty aristocracy see Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, pp. 260–82.

¹³ For this see the curricula vitae in the personal records of Karl Fürst von Wrede, (b. 5 Sept. 1876), Marie Adelheit Prinzessin Reuss zur Lippe (b. 30 Aug. 1895), Ernst Erbprinz von Lippe-Biesterfeld (b. 12 June 1902), and Christoph Prinz von Hessen (b. 14 May 1901), all in Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, Ref. 2 R (NSDAP-Personalakten). Summarized in Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, pp. 562–7.

potatoes and linen.¹⁴ The history of the *Deutsche Adelsgenossenschaft* (DAG, German League of Aristocrats) shows that after 1918 it was mainly the rapidly expanding 'aristocratic proletariat' which was responsible for the early radicalization of the largest German aristocratic association. Elements of the northern German, Protestant, petty nobility were particularly successful in steering the association on to a distinctly anti-Semitic course as early as the 1880s.¹⁵ As a result, in 1920 the DAG, which soon represented some 30 per cent of the adult aristocracy, introduced an 'Aryan clause' which excluded all aristocrats whose family trees included any Jewish ancestors later than 1800.¹⁶ In parallel, the DAG established the *Eisernes Buch des Deutschen Adels Deutscher Art* (Iron Book of the German Nobility of German Origin), known as *Edda*. This represented a German aristocratic stamp of approval which excluded 'racially impure' peers, thus sweeping aside the traditional definition of aristocracy.¹⁷ Although the metaphor of 'blood' was central to the traditional definition in all European aristocracies, for many centuries it had meant aristocratic birth and descent, traditions specific to the aristocracy, and cultural peculiarities. The practice now introduced, by contrast, represented nothing less than the self-destruction of this tradition with the tools

¹⁴ Stephan Malinowski, ' "Wer schenkt uns wieder Kartoffeln?" Deutscher Adel nach 1918 – eine Elite?', in Marcus A. Denzel and Günther Schulz (eds.), *Deutscher Adel im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (St Katharinen, 2004), pp. 503–37.

¹⁵ This can be demonstrated from the very first volumes of the *Deutsches Adelsblatt* (1883–1944). Graphic examples of the types of arguments used by this movement and its style can be found in a series of essays by Oldwig von Uechtritz, 'Semitismus und Adel', *Deutsches Adelsblatt* (1885), pp. 169–235.

¹⁶ An account of the debate at the *Adelstag* can be found in *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, 31 July 1920, pp. 241–3. On this see Kleine, 'Adelsgenossenschaft und Nationalsozialismus', and Stephan Malinowski, 'Vom blauen zum reinen Blut: Antisemitische Adelskritik und adliger Antisemitismus 1871–1944', *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, 12 (2003), pp. 147–68.

¹⁷ According to § 8 of the *Edda* constitution, 'one Semite or a coloured person' was the maximum permitted in the demonstrations of noble descent. See *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, 15 Apr. 1921, p. 98. On the debate and the constituent assembly, see the following issues of the *Deutsches Adelsblatt*: 38 (1920), pp. 259 f.; 39 (1921), pp. 82, 97–9, 115–17. By 1942, 4 vols. of the *Edda* had been published. By 1936, more than 6,000 applications for an entry in the *Edda* had been made.

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of a biologically-defined racism. According to the logic applied here, a single Jewish ancestor could invalidate a seven-hundred-year-old pedigree.

From the very beginning the DAG, which had been created by East Elbian estate owners in Berlin in 1874, brought together members of the old aristocracy who perceived the upheavals of the modern era from the vantage point of losers. The hard-line anti-Semitism, the association's affinity with the Stöcker movement, and its demand that the petty nobility 'seize the banner of leadership' within the anti-Semitic movement were all aimed at Wilhelm II and the high aristocracy. The DAG successfully resisted any trend towards a synthesis of élites encompassing rich, educated sections of the aristocracy and the upper middle class. Aggression towards the liberal bourgeoisie, which was accused of adopting Jewish values, and its allegedly Byzantine lifestyle had already characterized the association before 1918, and anti-Semitic campaigns served as one of its most important channels of communication with National Socialism.

The association's racial anti-Semitism implied the successive self-destruction of the aristocratic idea itself. In 1924, when Baron Börries von Münchhausen, an author widely read in aristocratic circles, defined the 'meaning and purpose' of the aristocracy as 'human breeding', thus making a direct comparison with the breeding of 'full-blooded horses', 'dachshunds', and 'pug dogs', this represented an intellectual low point, permanently damaging the traditional concept of the aristocracy. Münchhausen's line about mongrelized 'dachs-pugs' which were justifiably drowned by breeders—a clear reference to aristocratic families with Jewish relations—shows where the journey was heading.¹⁸ The more strongly 'pure-bloodedness' was declared the primary qualification for a modern 'leader class', the more did the aristocracy in effect undermine itself. After all, other groups were as 'pure-blooded' as the aristocracy, if not more so, as an influential section of the Nazi movement would soon argue.

¹⁸ Börries Freiherr von Münchhausen, 'Adel und Rasse', *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, 42 (1924), pp. 63-5.

II Similarities and Differences between the German Aristocracy and National Socialism

Since the German aristocracy was not socially, culturally, or politically homogeneous, it is extremely difficult to make general statements about the attitude of the German aristocracy towards National Socialism. However, it is possible to identify a number of fundamental structures which can then be applied to the aristocracy as a whole. I shall here outline the most important similarities and differences between the aristocracy and the Nazi movement. First, the similarities:

(1) An uncompromising and aggressive rejection of democracy, the parliamentary system, liberalism, and the party state provided the foundation upon which the old aristocracy and National Socialism identified a common enemy. By 1932 at the latest, the Nazi movement represented the most promising instrument with which to crush the political Left, something which the aristocracy first regarded as a challenge, but later as a welcome opportunity. In a letter from Count Friedrich von der Schulenburg to the last president of the Prussian Upper House, Count Dietlof von Arnim, the retired general abandoned his previous doubts in 1933: 'Hitler's success in the Reichstag was remarkable and it was a pleasure to watch him crushing the Social Democrats as if in passing. In any case, whoever persuaded old Hindenburg to hire Hitler as chancellor has performed a historic service.'¹⁹

(2) The blood-and-soil ideology with its negative references to large cities and 'asphalt culture', linked with praise of the 'soil'. In contrast to the English aristocracy, for example, which largely retained a lifestyle divided between town house and country seat, around 1900 the Prussian petty aristocracy developed a strong aversion to large cities, and Berlin in particular. By beating an ideologically motivated retreat from the metropolis, the Prussian aristocracy missed out on one of the most important routes of access to modernity. At the same time, the aristocracy's contempt for the capital,

¹⁹ Letters from Friedrich Graf von der Schulenburg to Dietlof Graf von Arnim, 23 Nov. 1932 and 8 Apr. 1933, in Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (Potsdam), Rep. 37 Boitzenburg.

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which it regarded as a *Parvenüpolis* and New Jerusalem, offered an important link with the Nazi movement's anti-urban rhetoric.²⁰

(3) Relentless invectives against 'materialism' and 'worship of Mammon' plus sharp anti-capitalist rhetoric and an implicit recognition of bourgeois (non-Jewish) property relations. The culture of scarcity stylized by the petty nobility is reminiscent of the ideas and rhetorical conventions of the Conservative Revolution, with which the German aristocracy maintained many personal, intellectual, and organizational links.²¹ The great anti-capitalist longing which Gregor Strasser would evoke in a sensational Reichstag speech in 1932 offered many points of contact with the aristocratic culture of scarcity.

(4) The aggressive style of the Nazi movement with its masculine and militaristic symbolism, particularly in the SA, which Sven Reichardt has recently described as anti-bourgeois.²² All variants of anti-bourgeois sentiment as cultivated by the entire New Right conjured up the ideal of a charismatic leader figure as the antithesis of the sickly, democratic 'philistine'. This quest was eventually bound to discover the aristocracy.

(5) Closely linked with this was contempt for the occupational core of the bourgeois élites, such as commerce, banking, the stock exchange, industry, and the university sector. In 1945, no more than 10 per cent of the aristocracy worked in these areas.²³ Much more strongly than in England, France, and Italy, the German aristocracy considered that it was incompatible with their social position

²⁰ Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, pp. 55-73; Heinz Reif, 'Hauptstadtentwicklung und Elitenbildung: "Tout Berlin" 1871 bis 1918', in Michael Grüttner et al. (eds.), *Geschichte und Emanzipation: Festschrift für Reinhard Rürup* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999) pp. 679-99.

²¹ On this see Stefan Breuer, *Ordnungen der Ungleichheit: Die deutsche Rechte im Widerstreit ihrer Ideen 1871-1945* (Darmstadt, 2001), and Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, pp. 90-104, 293-320, and 422-76.

²² Sven Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde: Gewalt und Gemeinschaft im italienischen Squadristismus und in der deutschen SA* (Cologne, 2002).

²³ See figures in von Hoyningen-Huene, *Adel in der Weimarer Republik*, pp. 378-405 and Karl August Graf von Drechsel, *Der bayerische Adel 1921-1951*, offprint from vol. 4 of *Genealogisches Handbuch des in Bayern immatrikulierten Adels*, in Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (Munich), Bestand Genossenschaft katholischer Edelleute in Bayern, no. 3.

(*unstandesgemäß*) even for the younger sons of the German aristocracy to pursue careers in trade, finance, and industry.

(6) The significance of the category of 'blood', which enjoyed a centuries-old tradition in the aristocracy and was freely linked with the category of 'race' as early as the Wilhelmine era. This was closely associated with a highly aggressive anti-Semitism in all branches of the aristocracy, including the Catholic nobility.

(7) Finally, aristocrats had a clear view of the opportunities which the rapidly expanding officer corps,²⁴ and the foreseeable 'ride eastwards', would provide for their caste. Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin, known in the literature as an unyielding opponent of the Nazis, expressed this in 1926: 'The fountain of youth that the colonial land acquired east of our borders, with unlimited settlement opportunities, represents, requires no discussion.'²⁵ By the beginning of the war at the latest, what Kleist formulated here as a vague hope had evolved into a scramble to share in the spoils. As early as 1939, members of the upper and lower, the rich and the poor, aristocracy were turning to the SS in search of vast estates in the looted territories.²⁶ For many aristocratic families, even for those who had lost any connection with the land, the prospect of being able to acquire property and settle in the East was obviously highly attractive.

Nevertheless, the aristocracy's relationship with the Nazi movement was considerably more complex than, for example, the ortho-

²⁴ During the Weimar Republic, the aristocracy was not permitted to provide more than 900 permanent officers in the Reichswehr. For purposes of comparison, in September 1937 the Reichsheer had 2,280 aristocratic officers, and by 1937 this number had almost trebled. More precise figures in Funck, *Feudales Kriegertum und militärische Professionalität*.

²⁵ Ewald von Kleist, 'Adel und Preußentum', *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, 23 (1926), p. 383.

²⁶ Examples of enquiries concerning the possibility of acquiring land in the conquered territories: Nikolaus Erbgroßherzog von Oldenburg to Heinrich Himmler, 2 Jun. 1941; Erasmus Freiherr von Malsen-Ponickau to the *Reichstatthalter* in Posnan, 16 Jun. 1941; Adolf Fürst von Bentheim-Tecklenburg-Rheda, letter dated 1939. (Applications are in the Party files of these three aristocrats in Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde.)

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dox Marxist analysis of fascism would have us believe.²⁷ I shall now discuss some important distinctions between National Socialism and the aristocracy, whether real or perceived:

(1) Only at first glance does the leader-follower ideal of Nazi ideology appear to dovetail with the aristocracy's intellectual world view. In a group which had exercised power for a thousand years, unconditional subordination to a mere party leader (one recalls Hindenburg's celebrated contempt towards the 'Bohemian corporal') was harder to achieve than in other groups.

(2) Concern that the second part in the name of the National Socialist movement might be meant seriously caused considerable scepticism towards the NSDAP long after 1933, particularly among the landed aristocracy. Even after the elimination of the party's Straßer wing, doubts about the Nazis' vaguely defined position on property questions, nationalization, and agrarian programmes probably remained the most important barrier between the propertied aristocracy and the Nazi movement. Many nobles warned against the 'Bolshevist experiments' contained in the Nazi programme.²⁸ However, discussions were held in castles and ancestral homes, to which Hitler and important Nazi leaders were invited. Thereupon these doubts gave way to a general hope that lost entailed estates would be restored.²⁹

(3) Both before and after 1933, another branch of the Nazi movement, both influential and vociferous, pursued a sharply anti-aristocratic line. It was mainly represented in public by Walther Darré, one

²⁷ GDR literature typically simply lumps the aristocracy, or the *Junker*, in with the 'fascists'. A characteristic example is the commentary on the important collections of sources edited by Kurt Gossweiler and Alfred Schlicht, 'Junker und NSDAP 1931/1932', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 4 (1967), pp. 644-62. The 'Junkertum', it is claimed here, was part of the 'Monopolbourgeoisie' (p. 651).

²⁸ Manfred von Binzer, 'Politische Bewegungen in Deutschland' (speech given to the DAG's aristocracy section, 6 Dec. 1930, in Berlin). Manuscript of the speech in Deutsches Adelsarchiv (Marburg), Bestand DAG (Bayern), vol. 6, issue: 'Adel und NS', esp. pp. 17-19. For southern Germany see Ludwig Pesl, 'Zur politischen Einstellung des Jungadels', *Gelbe Hefte*, 6 (1930), pp. 665-80, esp. pp. 671 ff.

²⁹ Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, pp. 516-20.

of the leading Nazi ideologists. In 1930 Darré had demanded a 'new aristocracy of blood and soil', maintaining that the old aristocracy had so little 'pure blood' in its veins that it was no longer a match for a 'racially Nordic' peasant boy.³⁰ The primitive anti-aristocratic prejudice which moved the *Gauleiter* of the Eastern March to refer to aristocratic large landholders as 'a heap of swine contaminated with Jewish blood',³¹ was widespread in the SA. This conflict intensified after 1933 when aristocratic 'fancy boys' and *Märzgefallene* (March recruits) proved to be more successful in exploiting new career opportunities than many of the petty bourgeois *alte Kämpfer* (old fighters).³²

(4) The aristocracy quite clearly perceived the struggle for dominance among the newly created élite organizations, and especially the SS, as a challenge. In its claim to leadership and élite status, the SS took recourse to aristocratic insignia and traditions in many areas. In general, the organization was conceived as a form of 'new aristocracy'.³³ While Darré's 'new aristocracy of blood and soil' represented a new 'leadership class' which was unmistakably directed against the old aristocracy, the leadership ideals of the SS were viewed as a race in which the aristocracy had to participate. In 1935 Count Kuno von Dürckheim called upon the aristocracy to pick up the 'noble gauntlet' and to compete with the SS in the construction of a future élite. 'As with livestock breeding', he wrote, wives were to be 'tested', while 'pure-blooded' men had to prove themselves in demanding

³⁰ Richard Walther Darré, *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden* (Munich, 1930), quotations at p. 163. Cf. Hans F. K. Günther, *Adel und Rasse* (Munich, 1926).

³¹ *Gauleiter* Kube to Gregor Straßer, 9 Oct. 1931, quoted from Wolfram Pyta, *Dorfgemeinschaft und Parteipolitik 1918-1933: Die Verschränkung von Milieu und Parteien in den protestantischen Landgebieten Deutschlands in der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf, 1996), p. 469.

³² *Märzgefallene* was the derogatory designation for the many members of the Nazi Party who opportunistically joined the Party between January 1933 when Hitler became Chancellor, and the halt on new memberships imposed in May 1933. *Alter Kämpfer* was an honorary title conferred on Nazis who had joined the movement especially early.

³³ Eckart Conze, 'Adel unter dem Totenkopf: Die Idee eines Neuadels in den Gesellschaftsvorstellungen der SS', in Conze and Wienfort (eds.), *Adel und Moderne*, pp. 151-80.

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professions.³⁴ With reference to the SS, which, as an exclusively male society, could form a leadership class but not reproduce itself, the DAG in 1938 described the task of the aristocracy as to 'join with the hereditarily healthy and valuable non-aristocratic families to form a sacred source from which the state and the party can draw their finest recruits'.³⁵

(5) Although dissent was rare in Prussia,³⁶ the Catholic aristocracy of southern Germany frequently objected to the anti-Christian aspects of National Socialism. The Catholic associations repeatedly spoke out against *völkisch* and anti-Christian articles in the *Adelsblatt*, provoking bitter controversies. In Prussia, young aristocratic men joined the National Socialist Party in large numbers, while, to take an impressive and characteristic example, the *Katholische Tatgemeinschaft*, dominated by young aristocrats, clearly rejected the Nazi movement and its hostility to the Church. 'Dear Friend!', we read in an appeal of May 1932, 'your place is always by the Holy Cross, not with those ... who have bent its arms.' In the Catholic south, this division continued until 1945.³⁷

(6) Resentments arising from monarchist loyalties are widely exaggerated in the literature on Prussia, and were only really relevant among the Bavarian aristocracy. Even within the Kaiser's inner circle, the fact that, by fleeing to Holland, Wilhelm II avoided the heroic death on the front which should have been his destiny was viewed as a disgraceful act of treason,³⁸ and the Crown Prince was

³⁴ Memorandum by Kuno Graf von Dürckheim, 'Nationalsozialismus und Adel' (autumn 1935), in *Deutsches Adelsarchiv* (Marburg), Bestand DAG (Bayern), vol. 2, no. 35/36.

³⁵ 'Warum ist der Zusammenschluss des reinblütigen deutschen Adels notwendig?' (circular letter, 20 May 1938, DAG), held in *Mecklenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv* (Schwerin), GHK III, no. 2647.

³⁶ The best-known example is Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin, *Der Nationalsozialismus: Eine Gefahr* (Berlin, 2nd edn., 1932).

³⁷ Lectures given by Hans Georg von Mallinckrodt and Anton Ernst Graf von Neipperg, mid-1932, at a conference of the *Katholische Tatgemeinschaft*, held in *Deutsches Adelsarchiv* (Marburg), Bestand DAG (Bayern), vol. 7, issue: 'Genossenschaft'. On this see Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, pp. 504–16.

³⁸ On the Kaiser's flight and how it was interpreted by the aristocracy see Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, pp. 228–58, and now also Martin Kohl-

widely viewed as an incompetent 'sissy'.³⁹ By 1932 at the latest, the ex-Kaiser's chief political advisers began putting their money on the NSDAP.⁴⁰ Drawing on vague statements by Hitler, a notion spread within the circle of advisers around the exiled Kaiser and the Crown Prince that they could use the Nazi movement as a Trojan horse in order to bring about a restoration. 'There is no doubt that Hitler wants it to culminate in the monarchy', Friedrich Graf von der Schulenburg, retired general, landowner, and Nazi Party member, mistakenly wrote in April 1933, in the letter cited above.⁴¹ In 1933–4 Hitler, at a number of meetings with aristocrats from Wilhelm II's staff of advisers and the German League of Aristocrats, had made at least vague promises about reintroducing the monarchy. 'Adolf Hitler himself, so far as is known, is a monarchist.'⁴² This assessment and the idea that the *Führergedanke* (leadership idea) would necessarily lead to 'undying leadership, that is, the hereditary monarchy', demonstrated resoundingly that the old guard of Prussian monarchism had understood nothing of what the signs of the new times indicated.⁴³ Even in 1934, members of the old imperial entourage drafted memos touting the grotesque notion that Hitler could be per-

tausch, *Der Monarch im Skandal: Die Logik der Massenmedien und die Transformation der wilhelminischen Monarchie* (Berlin, 2005).

³⁹ Letter from Friedrich Graf von der Schulenburg to Louis Müldner von Mülnheim (adjutant to the Prussian Crown Prince), November 1920, held in Bundesarchiv Berlin, 90 Mu 1, vol. 3, fos. 75 f.

⁴⁰ On this see Gerhard Granier, *Magnus von Levetzow: Seeoffizier, Monarchist und Wegbereiter Hitlers* (Boppard am Rhein, 1982) and Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, pp. 504–16.

⁴¹ Friedrich Graf von der Schulenburg to Dietlof Graf von Arnim, 8 Apr. 1933, held in Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (Potsdam), Rep. 37 Boitzenburg.

⁴² See the notes made by Wilhelm von Dommès (Wilhelm II's 'Hausminister') on Hitler's attitude toward the monarchy, 15 May, 10 Sept., and 24 Oct. 1933, printed in Willibald Gutsche and Joachim Petzold, 'Das Verhältnis der Hohenzollern zum Faschismus', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 10 (1981), pp. 917–39, at pp. 934–9.

⁴³ Bundesarchiv, Militärarchiv Freiburg, N 266, no. 46, fols. 1–4 (memorandum from August von Cramons to Hindenburg: 'Argumente für eine Rückkehr Seiner Majestät des Kaisers und Königs in Seine Rechte anlässlich des 75. Geburtstages').

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suaded to arrange for the reinstatement of the Kaiser on Wilhelm II's seventy-fifth birthday in January 1934. When, shortly afterwards, the ceremonies marking the imperial birthday were stormed by marauding SA units, aristocrats sent enraged reports to Hindenburg. 'With a loud bang', the 'intruding rabble' set off fireworks 'which ruined the ladies' dresses', and they 'played football with the steel helmets of elderly gentlemen'.⁴⁴ However, the horror of the assembled aristocrats did not illustrate real political disagreements. Rather, it demonstrated the drastic misconceptions of this ossified caste of nobles who failed to grasp either National Socialist goals or the brutality of the fascist style.

In this respect too, the Bavarian aristocracy followed a separate path. In Bavaria the aristocracy controlled the strongest monarchist movement of the Weimar era, and had its own recognized pretender to the throne. Baron Erwein von Aretin, one of the most important heads of the Bavarian aristocracy, never faltered in warning his king about the dangers of a latter-day reign of terror. In a letter to Crown Prince Rupprecht in December of 1930 he wrote: '[We would] vanish like chaff before the wind; what would remain would be a fanatical proletariat which shoots generals when they suffer defeats and [terrorizes] every property owner for being a "Jew"'.⁴⁵

(7) Finally, an arrogant reaction to Adolf Hitler, who was derided as someone who could merely drum up support was significant.⁴⁶ In post-1945 autobiographies, Hitler repeatedly appears as a badly dressed, soup-slurping parvenu without manners, who may well have seduced the passive masses but, we are continually reminded, had no effect whatsoever on the incorruptible nobles. While it is rel-

⁴⁴ Confidential letter from retired major general Rüdiger Graf von der Goltz, chair of the Reichsverband deutscher Offiziere, to von Leers, 27 Jan. 1934, held in Bundesarchiv, Militärarchiv Freiburg, N 266, no. 42, fos. 1-12.

⁴⁵ Erwein von Aretin to Crown Prince Rupprecht, 23 Dec. 1930, held in Archiv der Freiherren von Aretin, Haidenburg (private ownership). On the Bavarian nobility see also von Drechsel, *Der bayerische Adel* and Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, pp. 367-85.

⁴⁶ In the early stages of his political career, Hitler defined himself not as a leader, but as someone who would merely drum up support among the masses for the coming *Führer*. On this see Albrecht Tyrell, *Vom Trommler zum Führer: Zum Wandel von Hitlers Selbstverständnis zwischen 1919 und 1924 und die Entwicklung der NSDAP* (Munich, 1975).

atively easy to unmask these accounts as so many acts of *ex post facto* denial,⁴⁷ it is nevertheless likely that a centuries-old élitist attitude was indeed an important source of a specifically aristocratic dissent. Until Stauffenberg's revised oath in July 1944, rejection of the *Gleichheitslüge* (equality lie) and faith in their call to *Führertum* (leadership) represented the indestructible core of the aristocrats' sense of self.⁴⁸ Aristocratic attempts to construct a new type of 'leadership' in the radical right-wing associations produced situations within the Stahlhelm and the SA in which aristocrats ended up marching alongside – and sometimes even behind – their estate managers or agricultural workers.⁴⁹ The Nazi demand for traditional aristocratic notions to be utterly abandoned remained a constant source of conflict. The habits of authority, the product of a thousand years of domination, were virtually impossible to carry over into the structure of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The aristocracy remained a constant liability within the Nazi system.

III *The Extent and Significance of Aristocratic Convergence with National Socialism*

The extent of aristocratic convergence with National Socialism is difficult to measure precisely. It is likely that it was more pronounced among the Prussian nobility than among the Catholic nobility of southern Germany. A systematic evaluation of the NSDAP's mem-

⁴⁷ On the production of aristocratic self-images and the creation of aristocratic legends in autobiographies, see Marcus Funck and Stephan Malinowski, 'Geschichte von oben: Autobiographien als Quelle einer Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Adels in Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik', *Historische Anthropologie*, 7 (1999), pp. 236–70; Marcus Funck and Stephan Malinowski, 'Masters of Memory: The Strategic Use of Memory in Autobiographies of the German Nobility', in Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche (eds.), *Memory Work in Germany* (Urbana, Ill., 2002), pp. 86–103.

⁴⁸ Stauffenberg's oath (early July 1944) reproduced in Peter Hoffmann, *Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg und seine Brüder* (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 396 f.

⁴⁹ On this source of conflict within the SA see Stephan Malinowski and Sven Reichardt, 'Die Reihen fest geschlossen? Adlige im Führerkorps der SA bis 1934', in Conze and Wienfort (eds.), *Adel und Moderne*, pp. 119–50.

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bership lists has revealed sensational findings. It was already known, for example, that Count Fritz-Dietlof von der Schulenburg joined the NSDAP early in 1932. However, few people know that his famous father, the Kronprinz Army Group's last Chief-of-Staff, and two of his brothers, had joined the party earlier. The literature has also ignored the fact that of the Schulenburg family, 24 had joined the party by 1933, and 41 by 1945. The Schulenburg family was not an exception. Rather, it reflected the political orientation of the East Elbian aristocracy: the NSDAP membership lists in the former Berlin Document Centre contain 17 Tresckows, 52 Schwerins, 10 Gersdorffs, 67 Arnims, 23 Dohnas, 37 Goltzes, 13 Stülpnagels, 43 Kleists, 20 Bernstorffs, 34 Bismarcks, 43 Bredows, 40 Bülowes, 78 Wedels, 48 Winterfelds, and 34 Zitzewitzes.⁵⁰

The sixtieth anniversary of 20 July 1944 has recently seen the reputation of the plotters reach an all-time high in the Federal Republic of Germany. As there probably would not have been a 20 July plot without the aristocracy, and as a majority of the conspirators were aristocrats, a part of this glory falls on the entire aristocracy. Yet while the contribution of the aristocracy to 20 July cannot be denied, it is important to remember the chronology of events and relations. It should be noted that the aristocratic contribution to the transfer of power in January 1933, to the officer corps of the Wehrmacht and the SS, and to the consolidation of the Third Reich, was much more significant than its later contribution to the attempted *coup d'état*. Undoubtedly, a large part of the aristocracy was an integral part of the National Socialist system of domination and its war of aggression and annihilation – *coûte que coûte*, as the resistance fighter Henning von Tresckow famously put it.

It is here, among the membership records of the Nazi Party, and not among the hand-picked luminaries who are constantly drawn to the attention of the collective memory by journalists nostalgic for Prussia, that we find the *Namen die keiner mehr nennt* (names which no one mentions today), to quote the title of a bestseller by Marion

⁵⁰ These figures are taken from a sample comprising about 350 families. They are based on a systematic analysis of Nazi Party membership records in the former Berlin Document Centre in the Bundesarchiv Berlin Lichterfelde. On this see Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, pp. 569–78.

Gräfin Dönhoff.⁵¹ The fact that in our collective memory one ‘good’ Schulenburg can eclipse forty ‘bad’ Schulenburgs may be ascribed to an old aristocratic technique which Georg Simmel once perceptively described as the nobility’s astonishingly successful demand to be judged by its best rather than its average performance.⁵² But even among the richest, smallest, and most distinguished branch of the German aristocracy, that is, the high nobility, a total of 80 princes and counts had found their way to the party by 1933, and more than 270 by the end of the war. The Kaiser’s fourth son, Prince August Wilhelm, who joined the party and the SA in 1931 and served the Nazi propaganda apparatus as ‘Prince Auwi’ for years, is no more of an exception than Princess Hermine von Reuss, the second wife of the exiled Kaiser, who, with her sons from her first marriage, began intensively campaigning for the Nazi movement in the mid-1920s.

In her study of the Dreyfus affair, Hannah Arendt describes the ‘alliance of resentment and despair’ as a ‘mob’, and this is extremely helpful when attempting to explain the convergence of the petty aristocracy, in particular, with the Nazi movement. Arendt’s model of a new kind of coalition of the ‘*declassés* of all classes’⁵³ might well be a better explanation than the paradigm of an ‘alliance of élites’ which has informed our interpretation of the anti-democratic alliance since

⁵¹ This book by an influential journalist can be read as a valuable prototype of the sort of stylization by which German aristocrats, after 1945, sanitized the role of the aristocracy as a whole during the Nazi period. Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, *Namen, die keiner mehr nennt* (Berlin, 1977). On this work of selective memory see Eckart Conze, ‘Aufstand des preußischen Adels: Marion Gräfin Dönhoff und das Bild des Widerstands gegen den Nationalsozialismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland’, *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 51 (2003), pp. 483–508.

⁵² Georg Simmel, ‘Exkurs über den Adel’, in id., *Soziologie: Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*, vol. 11 of *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Otthein Rammstedt (Frankfurt am Main, 1992), pp. 824 f.

⁵³ Hannah Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft* (Munich, 1986), p. 195. Arendt’s perspicacious observations here on the role of the old aristocracy in *fin-de-siècle* Parisian society are unsurpassed. On this situation in France which, in many respects, anticipated that in post-war Germany, see William D. Irvine, *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered: Royalism, Boulangism and the Origins of the Radical Right in France* (New York, 1989).

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the days of Hans Rosenberg and Fritz Fischer.⁵⁴ This still prevails in the Marxist and the Bielefeld school interpretations, for example, in the third and fourth volumes of Hans-Ulrich Wehler's *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*.⁵⁵

To be sure, the convergence of large sections of the aristocracy with the Nazi movement goes far beyond this model. The real mystery is why even socially unchanged, established aristocratic groups supported the *völkisch* rampage of the petty nobility, or else accepted it with a shrug of the shoulders. Any explanation of this phenomenon must examine the cultural peculiarities of the aristocracy, its traditions, and its notion of the family. In a narrow world in which everyone knew everyone else, the solidarity of the entire aristocratic 'family', which had grown up over the centuries, and its inherent tendency toward ideological homogeneity was of the utmost importance. From the early nineteenth century to the end of the Second World War, the petty nobility which dominated Prussia steadfastly resisted all attempts at reform which would exclude their ruined 'peers' and create new coalitions with the rich, educated bourgeoisie.⁵⁶ Within the atmosphere of aristocratic solidarity which this resistance cemented, the aristocracy sealed itself off from the central demands of bourgeois civil society. The *grand seigneurs* followed a similar pattern of solidarity in their social and political dealings with their ruined and radicalized peers.

Furthermore, the history of the convergence between the aristocracy and Nazism can also be described as the history of a twofold

⁵⁴ Hans Rosenberg, 'Die Pseudodemokratisierung der Rittergutsbesitzerklasse', in id., *Machteliten und Wirtschaftskonjunkturen* (Göttingen, 1978), pp. 83-101; Fritz Fischer, *Bündnis der Eliten: Zur Kontinuität der Machtstrukturen in Deutschland 1871-1945* (Düsseldorf, 1979).

⁵⁵ Hans Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, vol. 3 (Munich, 1995), pp. 805-25; vol. 4 (Munich, 2003), pp. 323-31, 985-94. See also id., review of Dominic Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe 1815-1914* (1992), in *Die Zeit*, 3 Nov. 1995, p. 15.

⁵⁶ On this see Hugo Preuß, *Die Junkerfrage* (Berlin, 1897); Heinz Reif, 'Friedrich Wilhelm IV. und der Adel: Zum Versuch einer Adelsreform nach englischem Vorbild in Preußen 1840-1847', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 43 (1995), pp. 1,097-111; Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, pp. 118-97.

misunderstanding. The most significant legacy of the *völkisch* movement was that National Socialism did not abandon the aristocracy. However, what remained was merely the concept and individual elements of an aristocratic tradition which could be distorted and exploited. 'Aristocracy' remained an institution which the Nazis admired and needed, but only in the form of the mutations which Hitler, Günther, Darré, the SA and, ultimately, the SS leadership desired and created in their quest for an 'aristocracy' of their own. Conversely, a large section of the aristocracy recognized a modern version of its own traditions in the guiding concepts and aims of the Nazi movement. Yet the apparent affinity they identified in the mutual language of 'blood', 'soil', and 'race' turned out to be a fatal misinterpretation. The absurd perception of the Nazi movement as a modern extension of the 'best' aristocratic traditions was widespread among the aristocracy. It was based on the common use of key terms which were phonetically – but not semantically – identical. Thus the term 'conservative élites' is misleading. If terms from politics and social science are to continue to mean anything at all, then, at least after 1918, the majority of the aristocracy can be described as neither conservative nor as an élite.

It is well known that in January 1933 there was no 'conservative' alternative worthy of this name. This was partly because a large section of the aristocracy – one of the potentially most significant providers of such an alternative – had decisively broken with the 'conservative' tradition. Many of the close historical ties between aristocracy and conservatism⁵⁷ were not destroyed by the Nazi movement, as an influential interpretation claims, but had already collapsed of their own accord. All attempts on the part of the aristocracy to present itself as the genuine avant-garde of the Nazi movement (as described above) demonstrate a centuries-old tradition which had both forgotten and betrayed itself. Nowhere is this made clearer than in an after-dinner speech given by Friedrich von Bülow, chairman of the largest German family association, at the Bülow family meeting in 1935:

⁵⁷ On this see Panajotis Kondylis's impressive account, *Konservatismus: Geschichtlicher Gehalt und Untergang* (Stuttgart, 1986), esp. pp. 469–93.

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Upon blood and soil the Führer is building his Reich. We have understood blood selection for seven centuries and have built our bloodstream upon an age-old race and culture. ... All the great ideals which the Führer has established for the German people originate not least from the deepest treasure chambers of the German aristocracy. Thus in its very foundations the German aristocracy is akin both in nature and origin to National Socialism. ... This much we know: our old family is not a foreign body in the Third Reich, rotting and decaying, but rather it is a supporting beam in the structure, hardened over centuries. ... Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!⁵⁸

This speech shows how the aristocrats, like so many other discontented people at this time, confused National Socialism with their own unarticulated ideas and longings, as Martin Broszat once aptly put it.

The groups which asserted themselves within the aristocracy after 1918 and rejected every olive branch offered by the Republic were among the nobility's weakest groups. The social core of these groups was the military clan which had developed over the centuries. This was an aristocratic faction with many members in Prussia, whose sons were practically born in full uniform. This petty nobility – peniless, aggressive, and obsessed with its leadership claims – had a fateful influence both on the aristocracy itself and on the political culture of Germany as a whole. Among the diverse aristocratic traditions and types, it was not the rare, worldly, *grand seigneur* whose power was unbroken who was problematic. The aristocratic contribution to Nazi destruction at home and abroad involved a different type. It would therefore be useful for future research to concentrate less on the richest, most cultivated, and most elegant aristocratic families, and to look more closely instead at the proverbial Pommeranian lieutenant colonel (*Oberstleutnant*), the son of a Pommeranian lieutenant colonel who, having grown up in a circle of Pommeranian lieutenant colonels' sons, married the daughter of a lieutenant

⁵⁸ After-dinner speech given by the head of the family, Friedrich von Bülow-Omechau, at the Bülow family gathering, 8 July 1935. Quoted from the *Bülow'schens Familienblatt* (January 1936), held in Landeshauptarchiv Magdeburg (Außenstelle Wernigerode), Rep. E von Bülow, no. 52, fo. 66.

colonel from the Brandenburg Mark, a marriage which produced at least two more Pommeranian lieutenant colonel's sons. It was not only after 1918, when jobs for lieutenant colonels became scarce, that membership of this group, which was highly influential among the East Elbian aristocracy, proved to be a heavy burden. Far removed from the lifestyle and culture of the bourgeoisie, committed to a world dominated by simple ideas, and neither able nor willing to integrate into a democratic civil society, this group possessed an old, deeply rooted cultural code which stylized military killing and being killed into its own *raison d'être*.⁵⁹ The capacity of this particular aristocratic culture to adapt to the ideals and realities of the Third Reich is obvious.

IV Conclusion

In the twilight of its political history, the German aristocracy was essentially taking cues from groups which had practically nothing to do with the aristocratic way of life. Alongside the nobles' remaining bastions in agriculture, the bureaucracy, and the military, the aristocratic idea maintained its aura as the ultimate resource of power. The aristocracy was, and remained, a master of self-promotion, memory, and the production of images which were eagerly consumed by others. The version of Stauffenberg's execution which was mentioned at the beginning of this article is a classic example of this. This apocryphal account which, typically enough, was penned by an aristocratic secretary at the High Command, has been taken out of the narrative circle of the post-war aristocracy and transplanted by conservative historians and journalists into scholarly literature, where it has found a home ever since.⁶⁰ A statement by another, non-aristocratic

⁵⁹ On the social and cultural history of the Prussian 'military clans', see the comprehensive analyses by Marcus Funck, 'The Meaning of Dying: East Elbian Noble Families as Warrior-Tribes in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in Greg Eghigian and Matthew Paul Berg (eds.), *Sacrifice and National Belonging in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Arlington, 2002), pp. 26-63 and id., *Feudales Kriegertum und militärische Professionalität*.

⁶⁰ See Hoffmann, *Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg*, pp. 442 f. and Joachim Fest, *Staatsstreich: Der lange Weg zum 20. Juli* (Berlin, 1994), p. 280. Fest opts for an undocumented, but especially dramatic version of the story.

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eyewitness conveys a more prosaic version: no one hurled himself in front of anyone, and we will never know exactly what Stauffenberg called out before he fell.⁶¹

The bourgeois dream, Ernst Jünger wrote in 1929 in his book *Das Abenteuerliche Herz*, is the most boring to which mankind has ever succumbed.⁶² Because this is not without some truth, the educated middle classes, in their search for new ideals, continually return to the treasure chest of aristocratic myths. Today, this quest may yield questionable results and anecdotes, but it does no harm. However, in the period between the wars, with the establishment of a bourgeois civil society at stake, it exacted a high price.

⁶¹ On the source situation see Hoffmann, *Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg*, pp. 598 f. and id. *Widerstand, Staatsstreich, Attentat: Der Kampf der Opposition gegen Hitler* (Munich, 3rd edn., 1979), pp. 862 f.

⁶² Ernst Jünger, *Das Abenteuerliche Herz* (Stuttgart, 1987; first published 1929), p. 131.

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