
Part III: Profile of Thurn und Taxis

In the crypt of the heirs to the Hapsburg Empire

by David Goldman, Economics Editor



Below is the third and final installment of Mr. Goldman's account of his April 26 visit to the palace of the Thurn und Taxis dynasty in Regensburg, Bavaria, where he held a wide-ranging discussion with Crown Prince Johannes and Crown Princess Maria Gloria and members of their staff. That night, the Sovereign Prince, Karl August, died, and Johannes became the head of the family.

Parts I and II of this article described what is said to be the world's largest private fortune, and identified the key to the family's power as not wealth as such, but its centuries-long role as "chief agents of the foreign intelligence of the Republic of Venice"—from whom they adopted the practice of never tying themselves to fixed territorial or financial positions, and "setting all against all, always emerging on top of the rubble."

During their talk, Prince Johannes expressed support for Argentina against Britain, while predicting that Europe will be thrown into chaos, and "misguided efforts to industrialize countries like Argentina or Brazil will be suspended forever." The discussion continues below.

What did the Prince and Princess think of the leadership qualities that might help the Western world, for example, of Chancellor Helmut Schmidt?

"He's really a little man indeed," said the Princess, who speaks with a pronounced Bavarian accent.

"As an individual, he is no great statesman," continued her husband. "In any event the Social Democratic Party has lost so many votes; it hasn't been easy for the SPD to hold onto power with only 47 percent of the votes, and it is a great danger for the SPD, isn't it, that they are taking up rather comprehensive economic programs of a socialist nature. They can no longer manage. . . . He doesn't even have a Finance Minister. Things could go as far here as they have in England, and the SPD could split, like the Labour Party."

"What will happen in the coming elections in Hessen?" I asked the little group, referring to the decisive regional contest of next September.

"As it looks now, the Christian Democrats will get the absolute majority," predicted the aide.

"One shouldn't forget," added the Prince, "that it is

possible that the Free Democrats won't even get into the state parliament [of Hessen, because of the 5 percent cutoff rule—D.G.]. They have sucked up every political position like a vacuum cleaner; they are pushing social insurance and so forth, and their problems are as strong in their foreign policy as their domestic policy. [Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich] Genscher is no Churchill, he is no Bismarck, he's not even a Roosevelt; he's just a little man who represents whatever political opportunity happens to come along."

The conversation turned to the potential leadership qualities of the United States. "I think that the Americans are men of the moment," said the Princess. "For this reason, even if they still maintain a certain economic superiority, nonetheless they have no culture! Whenever I speak with American students, well, not history students, but let's take any other field, medicine or whatever, they seem well-educated indeed in their specialty, but where history is concerned, there they know nothing, which is the most important thing, from my point of view."

"Americans understand nothing of Europe, because of the American mentality," added the Prince's aide.

"There have been considerable changes," said the Prince. "But above all one shouldn't forget, when one sets forth a judgment on this matter, where this comes from. For example: take Goldman, as a German or Austrian immigrant to the United States of first or second generation, raised in America, who therefore should have an American mentality. Therefore one cannot say that this is a racial question, that is, so to speak, to be solved in a moment. Recently I spoke with a very interesting American specialist in genetics, and I said that a family like mine, which has brought forth only powers of leadership for 800 years, is a matter of some interest. How should that be understood in relation to the question of a better race—ah, well, Hitler also wanted to do that. But people can see quite clearly that as a result of the relevant play of natural forces, the best-yielding strains have continuously been crossed with even better ones. But as for intellectual and spiritual capabilities: how is it possible to deal with them from the standpoint

of genetics? That is a character problem.”

Somewhat later in the dinner-table discussion, the Prince added: “The Americans have such a distorted view of Germany. For example, perhaps 15 years ago, there came to visit me this stupid mulatto, Martin Luther King—of course I am not a racist—and he said, ‘Do you know, these dogs, which are attacking my brethren, they are German shepherd dogs? Why don’t you do something about this?’ Incredible!”

“A people that has no conscious culture, even if it has a great history, but no active, effective culture, will not be able to produce effective policy,” I responded. “That is reflected in the Reagan administration. If you ask around in Washington what sort of foreign or economic policies the United States needs, all you get is ridiculous scenarios off the computer, which have nothing to do with reality.”

“That’s right,” smiled the Prince.

“For this reason,” I continued, “there is the danger that a new world war, for which there is no good reason, could transpire through pure clumsiness and incompetence. Therefore, even if all that has been said about Helmut Schmidt be true, as an American, I might nonetheless envy the Germans for having a Chancellor who can still function in the real world.”

Reagan’s not as bad as Carter,” interjected the Princess. “Above all Iran is not his fault, and that was the beginning of the decline, because since Iran took place, the Soviets marched into Afghanistan, and since Iran, the Soviets have the chance to go into the Falklands situation.”

The Prince’s business manager impatiently brushed aside the issue of Schmidt. “You say that at least Schmidt can function, but in my opinion, he can’t do that at all any more. He is thoroughly lame. The position of his party, the SPD, is such that it can no longer make policy. The government is totally changed, and for that reason he will get nowhere with the Russians. It’s the greatest disaster in the history of the SPD.”

“That’s absolutely right,” said the Prince, and the issue was no longer open. If they were so insistent that the Western world could no longer produce policies that would enable it to survive, I asked at length, how did they expect the family to survive? The answer—geographical extension to the point that the family’s holdings would survive even an atomic strike against the United States—I have already quoted above. The Prince excused himself from the after-dinner coffee and cognac to go to the bedside of his ill father who, as it turned out, was to die later that evening, transmitting the hereditary title of *Fürst*—Sovereign Prince—to my discussion partner of the afternoon.

If I was not entirely convinced by what the Prince and Princess had told me of their long-range survival perspective, what I saw later in the day left no doubts in my

mind. The present-day palace is built atop the Benedictine Cloister of St. Emmeram, of which the family historian, Max Piendl, has written:

“The beginnings of the Benedictine Abbey of St. Emmeram reach back to the beginning of the eighth century. With the Bishopric organization of 739, a personal union between the Bishop and the Abbot of St. Emmeram was created, which was first separated in terms of right to the seat in 975, under the Bishopric of Bishop Wolfgang.”

The cloister itself contains elements of Roman, Carolingian, and Gothic construction, including fifth-century Roman pillars unearthed only recently when a heating system was built. Over the years the Benedictine monks, and since 1812 the princely staff, have maintained in superb condition an edifice which blends a thousand years’ diversity of architectural styles into a single harmonious whole. A beautiful double arcade of Gothic pillars is crowned by a Romanesque wheel window, and a long passage supported by Gothic arches culminates in one of the best-preserved Romanesque portals in Southern Germany. The building no longer houses religious ceremonies, which the family attends in a private chapel in the main palace building, where Mass is said Sunday mornings. Its main function is to support the 220,000-volume princely library, which contains the entire archives of the postal service of the Holy Roman Empire, probably the single most important document collection for the history of intelligence services, not to mention for other research. The Prince’s chief librarian showed me treaties between the family’s forebears and Charles II of England, written in the English king’s own hand. The great reading room of the library was reconstructed to match the monks’ original library, and its ceiling frescoes were only laid bare through the stripping of inferior Rococo decorations a dozen years ago. The library’s shelves were restocked with leather-bound books of the 16th through 18th centuries, and comprise what must be the largest private rare-book collection in the world, far more impressive than that of most university libraries.

A descent into the crypt

At length I was shown the family crypt, located in a vault of the abbey—a long, low, dark room occupied by a couple of dozen unburied coffins. From the rational world of archives and art restoration, my guide and I had descended into the realm of grotesque Romanticism. The dim cast-iron-framed electric lights gave off no more glow than candles. In the half-dark I inspected the displayed coffins, which contained the same personages whose portraits from life I had previously viewed in the endless filigreed galleries of the adjoining palace. One by one, my guide introduced me to the still-unburied last remains of Thurn und Taxis ancestors of the last three centuries. In an ornate cast-iron coffin

decorated to look like a miniature castle lay the Princess Helena, who 150 years earlier had been the sister of the Hapsburg Empress, and now occupied the extreme left-hand position in the long double row of ancestors. Moving rightward, away from the narrow stone entrance, my guide compared portraits and coffins, until we came to the grandfather of Prince Johannes and the father of the still-living Fürst Franz-Josef, in an undecorated but majestic oaken coffin. As I write this, one more coffin will have been placed by the side of that of Franz-Josef, who died in 1971.

I had seen many family vaults, but none where the coffins stood uninterred, instead of finding a permanent resting place in the floor, or the wall, of the crypt. The perspective of the long row of dead was eerie.

Only then did the meaning of the Prince's words earlier become clear to me: this family, once the most powerful in Europe, perhaps now more powerful still, has no home, and will never bury its dead in a single place. From its place of origin in Bergamo, in Northern Italy, the family was virtually expelled after the collapse of the Hohenstaufen Emperors, by whose side it fought during the 13th century. It emigrated to Brussels, where, by the 15th century, it had provided leading courier services to the Most Serene Republic of Venice. When the Venetians, through the Fugger banking house, bought the Imperial crown for the fledgling Charles V, the family expanded into Bohemia, establishing the line now represented by Count Max von Thurn und Taxis. Its leading position in the Hapsburg Empire, which it virtually controlled when the 17th-century Hapsburgs became inbred morons, brought it the status of Imperial Princes, and the control of the postal services brought the family to Frankfurt, the site of coronation for the Holy Roman Emperors. A palace built by the family in the 1730s in Frankfurt was never really occupied, for Emperor Charles VII made the Thurn und Taxis Prince his representative at the Regensburg Imperial Congress in 1748. The fortunes of the Napoleonic Wars ensured the family's position in Regensburg with the acquisition of the St. Emmeram Abbey, whence it maintained the postal service for most of Germany until Prussia shut it down just prior to German unification, and kept its own regiment of soldiers until after World War I. But the Venetian principle—power over ideas, power over wealth, but never dependence on specific territory—prevailed to the point that the family did not consider its Regensburg site sufficiently permanent to lay its dead into the unchanging earth.

The Allgemeine SS

As I learned subsequently, the Romantic grotesquerie I had found so horrifying had aroused different responses from other visitors to the palace. The late Karl-August was host to the occult rituals of the

Allgemeine (Universal) SS, the core of the Nazi movement, directed by his friends, Heinrich Himmler and Walter Schellenberg; they could have chosen no more appropriate setting for their bestialities.

A generation earlier, a Thurn und Taxis prince had founded, at the turn of the century, the notorious Thule Society, the mystic cult of the Northern race that adopted the swastika symbol from the British racists Rudyard Kipling and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and whose members included virtually the entire future leadership of Hitler's SS. One generation previously, the reigning Thurn und Taxis family head, Prince Max, controlled the feeble-minded homosexual King Ludwig II of Bavaria, through a Thurn und Taxis Prince assigned as Ludwig II's chief aide-de-camp. Historians attribute to the family control of the Bavarian court. Ludwig not only sponsored the Nazis' chief cultural idol, composer Richard Wagner, but subsidized the Blood and Soil extensions of Romanticism that Bavarian cavalry officer Karl Haushofer ultimately put into the book he ghost-wrote for Hitler: *Mein Kampf*.

For reasons that are still unclear, Karl-August, the hard-core SS backer, was stripped of his major's rank and imprisoned by Hitler in 1944. According to family accounts, the intervention of his Portuguese in-laws with the Axis-leaning fascist government of Salazar in Lisbon saved Karl-August's life. Prince Johannes, as noted, is anxious to present his family as anti-Nazi. "When I was 10 years old," he told me, "I had to stand before my entire school class when they joined the Hitler youth and tell them, '*Ich mache nicht mit*' ['I won't go along']. I was beaten up for this every day after school for a year."

But his attitude towards the Nazis shines through the disclaimers since, as a putative sovereign, he does not believe he should have to disguise his views before anyone. Over coffee and cognac after dinner, speaking of an artist who had continued to work in Germany through the war, he said, "G. wasn't a Nazi. He was just like Albert Speer, a young architect who dreamed of building great buildings. Suppose the big boss came to you, Goldman, an economist, and said, run the banking system, and meanwhile went off and did terrible things. Would that be your fault?"

"Speer was a mass murderer," I replied. "He set up the slave labor programs that murdered 12 million people."

Prince Johannes's aide jumped in to prevent His Serenity from exploding before such insolence. "That is true, Your Serenity. Speer did set up the death organization."

"Oh, well," Prince Thurn und Taxis conceded. "It is possible that Speer may be a somewhat different case."

The objects of art most sacred to the family are the

so-called Battle Tapestries commissioned in 1669 and executed by collaborators of the Belgian artist (and Hapsburg intelligence agent) Peter Paul Rubens. No copies of the eight giant tapestries have ever been made, and the original cartoons remain under lock and key at the palace.

The Taxis family of the 17th century, approaching the zenith of their power under the Hapsburgs, had bought themselves a genealogy linking them with the Torriani (Thurn) family of the Hohenstaufen era of Germany and Italy in the 12th century; even the family's own recent published histories admit the connection to be a bogus work of social-climbing. It is nonetheless ironic that the family has clung to its supposed relationship to the Hohenstaufen, the great city-builders of the Gothic era whose destruction in 1268 ushered in the new Dark Age and the great plagues that killed one-third of Europe's population. Dante Alighieri had criticized their attempt to complete Charlemagne's project of unifying European Christendom, for its failure to elevate the European population to the qualities required to make it successful. For this Dante proposed, and carried out in the case of Italian, the eloquence of the vernacular language, as an instrument to ennoble the common citizen, to make him worthy to be a citizen of a republic.

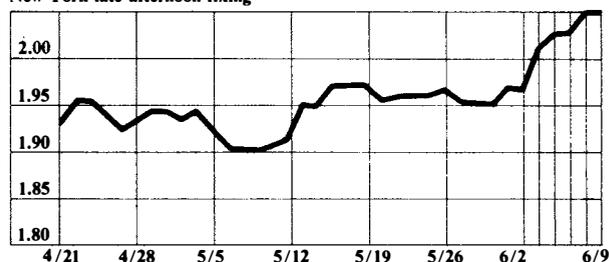
With the accession of Charles V of Hapsburg, already King of Spain and Burgundy when he took the Austrian-based imperial crown in 1519, the Venetian paymasters of the Holy Roman Empire turned the Hohenstaufen principle around, and made a leading principle out of its weaknesses. Instead of nation-states, which France under Louis XI had become during the past century, the Hapsburg principle became "universal monarchy," in opposition to the emergence of nations. Friedrich Schiller's evaluation of the history of the period was that the notion of "universal monarchy," the forerunner of what is now called "one-worldism," represented the greatest evil in the world; he defended the brutally destructive Thirty Years' War on the single ground that it threw this principle back, and gave room to the emergence of the modern nation-state in Europe.

For all the supposed progress in world political affairs since the time of Charles V, the issues and even the names that move history have not changed. What has changed, perhaps for the worse, is the capacity of the populations of would-be republics to understand those issues in a way they did two centuries ago. Fürst Johannes von Thurn und Taxis is no more afraid of expressing his intentions than the fictional Venetian inquisitors in Schiller's masterpiece *Der Geisterseher* (*The Man Who Saw Ghosts*). As he said, he believes that Americans lack the political culture to understand who and what he is in the first place.

Currency Rates

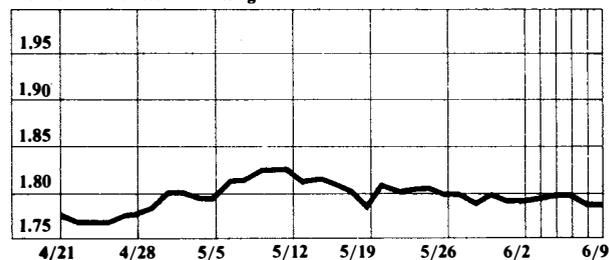
The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing



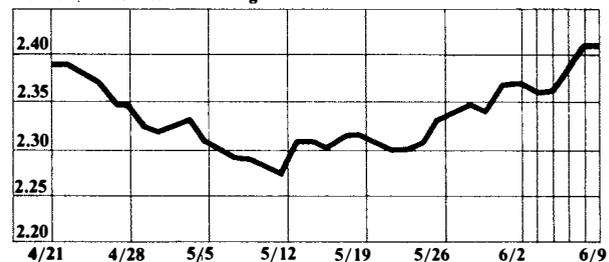
The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing

