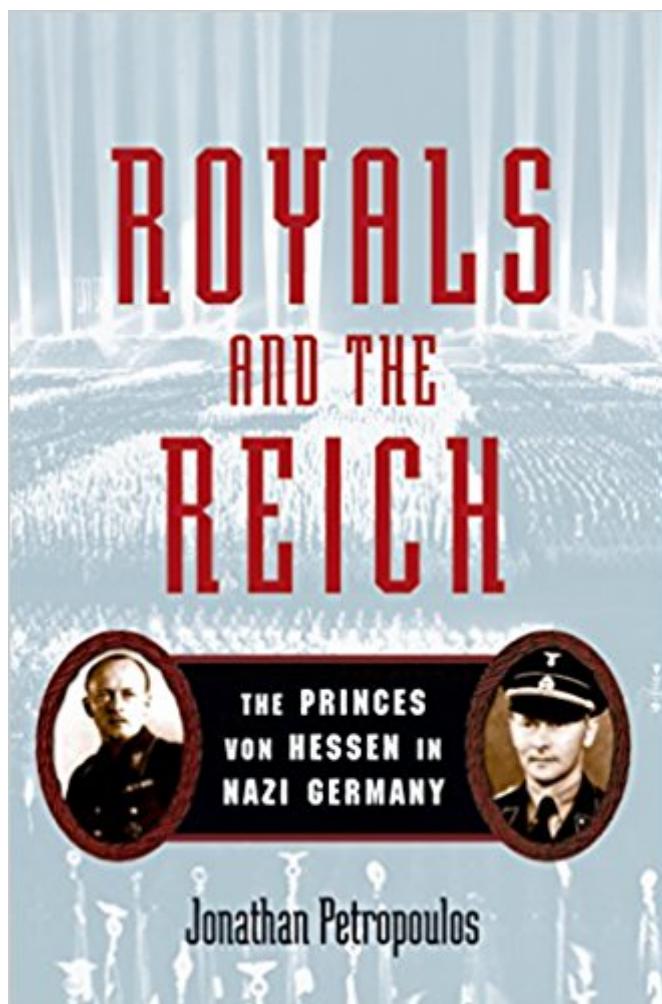


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Royals And The Reich: The Princes Von Hessen In Nazi Germany



Synopsis

Princes Philipp and Christoph von Hessen-Kassel, great-grandsons of Queen Victoria of England, had been humiliated by defeat in World War I and, like much of the German aristocracy, feared the social unrest wrought by the ineffectual Weimar Republic. Jonathan Petropoulos shows how the princes, lured by prominent positions in the Nazi regime and highly susceptible to nationalist appeals, became enthusiastic supporters of Hitler. Prince Philipp, son-in-law to the King of Italy, became the highest-ranking prince in the Nazi state and developed a close personal relationship with Hitler and Hermann Göring. Prince Christoph was a prominent SS officer and head of the most important intelligence agency in the Third Reich. In return, the princes made the Nazis socially acceptable to wealthy, high-society patrons. Prince Philipp even introduced Göring to Mussolini at a critical stage in the Nazi Party's development and later served as a liaison between Hitler and the Italian dictator. Permitted access to Hessen family private papers and the Royal Archives at Windsor Castle, Petropoulos follows the story of the House of Hesse through to its tragic denouement--the princes' betrayal and persecution by an increasingly paranoid Hitler and prosecution and denazification by the Allies.

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Customer Reviews

Philipp and Christoph von Hessen-Kassell were great-grandsons of Queen Victoria and nephews of Kaiser Wilhelm II. They were born into the highest circles of wealth and privilege in pre-World War I Germany, living in a variety of palaces and castles and secure within a wide family circle which extended into nearly every royal dynasty in Europe. Petropoulos' central story examines how such men could have been seduced into participating in the highest levels of one of the most thuggish regimes in modern times. The Hessen family, like other royal/noble clans, was severely shaken by World War I. Although they did not lose all their property (or their lives) as so many of their relations did, Philipp and Christoph's family saw their status slip and some of their wealth vanish. This, along with the terrible suffering more ordinary Germans underwent in the post-World War I period, made the Hessen princes prime targets for the appeal of Nazism: militarism, aggressive nationalism, revenge for past defeats. After Hitler's coming to power in 1933 and the establishment of the Third Reich, the Nazi Party made a concerted effort to win the support of highly placed individuals and families. Much of the German aristocracy and many members of former royal houses joined the Party, and while they may have privately sneered at the lumpenproletariat side of the Nazis and contrasted it with their own urbane sophistication, they were not above working for and doing the bidding of those they considered so uncouth. Philipp and Christoph were two prime examples. Philipp assisted Hitler in cultural affairs and, since he was married to a daughter of the Italian king, often served as an envoy to Mussolini. Christoph ran one of the Nazi intelligence agencies and served as a fighter pilot in World War II. Both were members of the SS, and both were used by Hitler to try to win influence with their cousins, the British royal family. Having so much access to Hitler meant making a lot of moral compromises for the Hessens. Neither was particularly anti-Semitic (at least by the standards of the time) and had Jewish friends, but both were silent participants in the early stages of the Final Solution and similar atrocities. Both were artistic and fairly well educated by the standards of their caste, but neither protested the Nazi book-burnings or the destruction of art deemed insufficiently Aryan. Petropoulos does a good job contrasting this lack of action by the Hessens with the opposition of such aristocrats as Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, who with his family suffered enormously because he refused to collaborate. As so often happens to those who cooperate with evil, Philipp and Christoph became victims themselves. Philipp and his wife (the beautiful Princess Mafalda of Savoy) ended up in concentration camps where Mafalda died after terrible sufferings. Christoph was killed in a suspicious plane crash after

he too lost the Nazis' favor. After the war Philipp spent time in POW camps and went through a long drawn out denazification process before being allowed to retire, poorer and hopefully wiser, to what was left of his estates. Petropoulos had the cooperation of many members of the Hessen family and other German nobles as well as that of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, who was Christoph's brother-in-law. He does a good job depicting the two men as the cultivated, charming cosmopolitans they were, and the reader is left with a disturbing question: If men such as these could be corrupted by the Nazis, is anyone really safe from similar extremism?

Book arrived on time, like new condition. Excellent research, showing how the German aristocracy supported the Nazis in their rise to power, although the aristocracy had regrets in the early 1940's. Many princes and princesses were members of the Nazi party, including the SA and SS. This is well documented. Fascinating book.

This book tackles a subject that most histories of WWII either ignore, gloss over, or paint all such people with the same brush. The author truly displays how the remaining aristocracy who survived WW I found itself between a rock and a hard place. They were forced into tacit or implied support of National Socialism or they would lose what income and property remained after Bismark's thefts by legislation during the establishment of democracy, and after the insanity of Kaiser Wilhelm's WWI. A long read that seems somewhat convoluted, but he uses the structure of talking about two brothers and how they differed in their survival/accommodation of Nazism, but he could be talking about many aristocratic families.

Those who appreciated the revelations of this book, and the moral questions it certainly raises, should also check out at least the reviews (including my own) for 'The Russian Roots of Nazism' by Michael Kellogg, as it outlines the connection between the early NSDAP and the Russian monarchy. Sort that much out first - and it's truly an eye-opener - and you'll be better prepared to make sense of these later interactions between the royals of Germany and other nations in their dealings with the National Socialists. It will also convince you that 'Royals and the Reich' is an especially important piece of the big picture. There are countless books on WW2 but the sum total of these two books came the closest to answering what it was all about for me. Both authors have an incredible modesty for the master historians they are; for they not only had to locate long suppressed files, sort the wheat from the chaff, and assemble the puzzle as best as possible, but then had to find the words to explain it all to us.

Good read. Could get slow at times and definitely had some repetitive overlap. It gave me a thorough understanding of Royals in Germany before and after the war and the challenges and mysteries. I am still not sure how involved they were in the extermination of all the Jews, but am not convinced they were appalled either. They could not have risen to those high ranks of military service and been so close to Hitler and Goring and not know what was going on in the camps and the inhumanities suffered by so many people. Certainly a dark history for their families to endure.

I got sucked into this book. I came to it by way of Princess Mafalda, a truly tragic story. Her husband was Prince Philipp of Hesse, one of the two subjects of this history, the other being his brother Christoph. Both were high aristocracy in Germany and both intimates of Hitler and the Nazi regime. The book traces the connections between the aristocracy of Europe and Nazi Germany. It is intricate, revealing, fascinating. Full of insights into the personal life of Hitler. A gripping story. You have to weigh through mind-boggling genealogies but it's worth it.

It's a terrific contribution to life in the upper strata of Hitler's Germany. This book covers a specific family and the aristocracy as a whole very thoroughly. That said, the author is just so long winded. Specifically I'm thinking about the section on bombing the British royal couple at the castle in London. Was Christoph involved or not? Well, it looks like not. He could have summed up all the evidence in three paragraphs instead of an extremely long chapter. You just wish he'd get to the point.

Ah yes, those great royals in Europe. You never can tell.

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