Ludwig Bamberger on Bismarck's Martial Appearance in the Reichstag (1891)

Abstract

The reputation of the Prussian army and its officer corps was not particularly high in the first half of the nineteenth century. The three Wars of Unification in 1864, 1866, and 1870/71 changed that. Officers and regiments who had served the national cause became household names, and military habits of mind began to pervade German society as never before. In this short text, a German liberal, Ludwig Bamberger (1823–1899), refers to Bismarck's habit of wearing a military uniform whenever he appeared in the Reichstag. It is but one example of the particular allure radiated by the military in Imperial Germany. Bamberger nevertheless notes that Bismarck's sartorial choices were not universally applauded.

Source

The German parliament is the only one in the world in which the ministers and their representatives appear with a saber at their side, holding their speeches with one hand on the pommel. At lively moments in the debate, it may also happen that the hand's grip on the sword automatically assumes the form of a characteristic gesture. This peculiarity of our representative conditions is also not without deeper meaning. On the contrary, it is much more meaningful than the *stucco di lustro*, which is said to come off easily, and which may fall on the deputies' heads in the event of tremors.

There has been a lot of conjecture about why Prince Bismarck conducted state business in the garb of a stereotypical cavalry officer. In private conversations, he sometimes introduced all sorts of secondary reasons for this. He knew very well why he actually did this, however. Although the magic of his power certainly did not lie in the uniform, it nevertheless served him well. And like everything else that originated with him, this element of his appearance also exerted its effect on the whole.

Source: Ludwig Bamberger, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, *Politische Schriften von 1879 bis 1892*. Berlin: Rosenbaum & Hart, 1897, p. 333; reprinted in Gerhard A. Ritter, ed., *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich 1871–1914. Ein historisches Lesebuch*, 5th rev. ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992, p. 110.

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