

Striving After Style: Francophone Diplomacy in Prussia, 1740–86

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On June 2, 1740 – only two days after the death of his Francophobic father Frederick William I – Frederick II proclaimed that French would become the official working language of the Prussian foreign ministry.¹ In some ways, the news could have hardly come as a surprise. While it began as just one foreign language among many, French had largely supplanted Latin and other vernaculars by the eighteenth century to become the major international language of European diplomacy, science, and the arts.² Many states in greater Germany already had Francophile rulers and French-speaking courts in this period. Yet the Frederician regime remained an outlier to the extent that it granted exclusivity to the use of the French language in multiple official spheres.³ As French became the operating internal language of the foreign ministry and of other institutions, such as

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¹ *Cabinetsordre* of June 2, 1740, “Die Ausfertigungen in französischer Sprache abzufassen,” in Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, eds., *Acta Borussica: Denkmäler der Preußischen Staatsverwaltung im 18. Jahrhundert*, 42 vols. (Berlin, 1892–1982) vol. 6, part 2, *Akten vom 31. Mai 1740 bis Ende 1745*, eds. Gustav Schmoller and Otto Hintze (Berlin, 1901), 6–7.

² Ulrich Ammon, “International Language,” in R. E. Asher, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, vol. 4 (Oxford, 1993), 1725–30.

³ On French in the German principalities, see Indravati, *Négociier pour exister*, 308–13; Blanning, *Power of Culture*, 53–77; Espagne and Middell, eds., *Von der Elbe bis an die Seine*; Réau, *L’Europe française*, 47–54; and Brunot, *Histoire de l’Europe française*, 5: 278–91, 8: 548–57, and 8: 582–607. Certain German-dialect principalities in the Holy Roman Empire that bordered France, such as the duchy of Luxemburg, also conducted their administration in French: Brunot, *ibid.*, 8: 371–72. The Russian Empire came to use French in its internal diplomatic correspondence as well, albeit some decades after Prussia: Offord, Rjéoutski, and Argent, “French as a Diplomatic and Official Language in Imperial Russia.”

the newly re-founded Academy of the Sciences, its frequent use led to a parallel evolution of French style as a matter of distinction between commoners and elites.⁴

How and why did French become a defining element of state policy in Prussia? On the broadest scale, historians have suggested a number of underlying trends: from the appeal of literary French to the widespread presence of French-speaking Huguenots in German lands.⁵ More specifically in Prussia, the language's official status built on a seventeenth-century tradition of common usage at court and in elite social circles, a custom that continued to some extent even through the early nineteenth century.⁶ And as for the most immediate causes, much can certainly be attributed to the personal Francophilia of the King himself, subject of an ample literature that dates back centuries.⁷ His personal use of the language was central to his self-fashioning as an enlightened Apollo at the head of a cultivated European court.⁸

Yet the history of Prussia is greater than the history of Frederick alone. This article decenters the discussion of French in Prussia by changing focus from the royal court in Potsdam to a different setting: the French-speaking *Cabinets-Ministerium* based in Berlin.⁹ In doing so, it shows how Francophone diplomacy provided a number of practical benefits to the Prussian regime.¹⁰ From the vantage point of Frederick's *Cabinets-Ministerium*, the language mobilized the kingdom's considerable Huguenot and international talent for the benefit of state service, granted access to a cosmopolitan network of informants, and abetted Prussia's recognition as a European great power independent from the Holy Roman Empire.¹¹

This evidence all seems to suggest that Frederick and his administration adopted French for quite practical reasons. On the other hand, the principles of style that developed along with the language often cut against the more meritocratic or rationalized elements of an administration that conducted its affairs in French.¹² Much of this had to do with the dual nature of the term "*style*" itself. In the literal sense, *style* was a manner of address – a conventional form of formal speaking or writing. But French dictionaries from the period also defined *style* as a sort of natural ease, a

⁴ Selected English-language references on the role of French in the re-founding of the Berlin Academy of the Sciences include: Lifschitz, *Language and Enlightenment*, 70–71; Terrall, "The Culture of Sciences in Frederick the Great's Berlin"; and Aarslef, "The Berlin Academy under Frederick the Great." On "distinction," see Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

⁵ Böhm, "Language Ideology"; Réau, *L'Europe française*, 47–54 and 83–92; and Brunot, *Histoire de l'Europe française*, 5: 332–52, 8: 531–47, and 8: 558–81.

⁶ Horowski, "Le français de cour"; and Wittenauer, *Kultur und Sprache am Hof der Hohenzollern*, 86–90 and 106–108.

⁷ Already in 1915, the English critic Lytton Strachey expected that his readers would be "familiar" with Frederick's Francophilia through the accounts of Thomas Carlyle and Thomas Babington Macaulay, written in the nineteenth century: Strachey, "Voltaire and Frederick the Great," 167.

⁸ Frederick's French "self-fashioning" is discussed in Blanning, *Frederick the Great*, 51–52; and Lifschitz, *Language and Enlightenment*, 69–70. On Frederick's court as an element of European cross-cultural communication, see Biskup, *Friedrichs Größe*, 28–29 and 93–97.

⁹ This article uses period spelling throughout (for example, *Cabinets-Ministerium* in lieu of *Kabinettsministerium*) and reproduces the original orthography and punctuation of passages written by Germans in French.

¹⁰ Rahul Markovits similarly stresses the significance of political factors in the adoption or repulsion of French across Europe in locations from Parma (adoption) to Hanover (repulsion). Markovits, *Civiliser l'Europe*, 133–48 and 187–95.

¹¹ Petersilka, "Friedrichs II. sprachliches Selbstverständnis," 210–11; Scott, "Prussia's Royal Foreign Minister," 500–26; and Müller-Weil, *Absolutismus und Außenpolitik in Preußen*, 182.

¹² The primacy of French style in noble recruitment perpetuated what Max Weber called "collegiate, honorific, and avocational forms of administration," even as the new technical requirements brought about by the mastery of French contributed to the development of the modern Prussian bureaucracy in other respects: Weber, *Economy and Society*, 2: 973–74 (quote on 973).

very slight learned disregard for these very same stylistic norms.¹³ This figurative sort of *style*, a Continent-wide phenomenon that Norbert Elias described as a “civilizing process,” developed in the seventeenth century within France to favor courtly speakers over learned ones.¹⁴ And it was this socially-defined concept of *style* – of *bel usage* as opposed to merely grammatical *bon usage* – that gained precedence in Prussia in the eighteenth century.¹⁵ Well-connected members of the Prussian elite argued that they were socially superior to native-born Frenchmen and Francophone Huguenots who could speak and write with grammatical precision, but had not mastered the norms of courtly style.

This article draws on a significant repository of archival material – five decades’ worth of applications to work in the Prussian *Cabinets-Ministerium* and its associated training school, the *Pépinière*. These sources betray an increasing obsession with “le style françois” as it became a vehicular medium of cross-cultural communication and a proxy for status and good breeding. Prussian noble families developed elaborate mechanisms to form well-connected recruits into the urbane secretaries and ambassadors who would be worthy of representing Prussia abroad. Native Frenchmen, Prussian nobles, and Francophone Huguenots all proposed their own definitions of how to capture this elusive French style, and the amount of French needed to be “fluent” increased in an absolute sense as the language expanded within Prussia.¹⁶ Yet the greater part of this increase was couched in stylistic terms that were dictated both by current bureaucrats and by the well-connected landed nobility, the *Junkers*, who gradually re-patrimonialized the highest levels of the Prussian bureaucracy throughout the eighteenth century.¹⁷ Their conception of style displayed what could be called an *acceleration of distinction*, an increasingly frequent mutation of styles and tastes that benefited the speakers who could keep abreast with these changes.

This understanding of French style is significant because Prussia played such a pivotal role in the subsequent spread of the French language across Europe.¹⁸ For French was more than a “national” language in this period – and also something less. Courtly elite French was a prestigious sociolect that was adopted by elites across the Continent – but only by a privileged minority within France itself.¹⁹ While nationalist historians have often referred to this linguistic and cultural hegemony as “French Europe,”²⁰ it is therefore more accurate to suggest the reverse: the reign of

¹³ The 1762 *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* states these definitions as “La manière de composer, d’écrire”; and as “figurément & familièrement, La manière d’agir, de parler.” *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, 4th ed. (1762), s.v. “style.” See also the extended discussion of *style* in the *Encyclopédie*, which dedicated some seventeen articles to the subject.

¹⁴ Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 92–97.

¹⁵ On France, see Fumaroli, *L’âge de l’éloquence*, 30–31. On Germany, see Blackall, *The Emergence of German as a Literary Language*, 160–75. On *bel usage* as opposed to *bon usage*, see Lodge, *A Sociolinguistic History of Parisian French*, 160–62.

¹⁶ One objective record of the growth of French in Germany is the profusion of textbooks and manuals that accompanied the spread of the language. See the bibliographies by Kuhfuß, *Eine Kulturgeschichte des Französischunterrichts in der frühen Neuzeit*, 653–70; and Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française*, 8: 628–29.

¹⁷ Rosenberg, *Aristocracy, Bureaucracy, and Autocracy*, 155–56.

¹⁸ Böhm, “Language Ideology,” 178; Braun, *Von der politischen zur kulturellen Hegemonie Frankreichs*, 128; Réau, *L’Europe française*, 50–52; and Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française*, 8: 558–72.

¹⁹ Martin Durrell, “Sociolect/Soziolekt,” in Ulrich Ammon, Norbert Dittmar, Klaus J. Mattheier, and Peter Trudgill, eds., *Sociolinguistics/Soziolinguistik: An International Handbook of the Science of Language and Society*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 2004), 200–205. On the history of courtly French as a minority language within the Hexagon, see Cohen, “The Making of a National Language in Early Modern France.”

²⁰ The term “French Europe” was coined by Louis-Antoine Caraccioli in *Paris, le modèle des nations étrangères ou l’Europe française* (Paris, 1776). While many historians have justly criticized Caraccioli’s solipsistic vision of a “French Europe,” his work remains significant for the manner in which it connects the spread of the French

“European French.”²¹ The circulation of the French language beyond national borders was part of a greater circulation of people, goods, and ideas that was built on networks of transnational communication.²² The steady professionalization of great power diplomacy further encouraged a new cosmopolitan and secular notion of “Europe,” one shared by a small number of speakers scattered in an archipelago and not concentrated in one nation.²³ Prussia was a major center of “European French” where a small number of elite speakers – in distinction from the numerically larger population of French-speaking Huguenots – used the language quite intensely to prove themselves as Europeans and to be accepted in an international community of equals.

While the discussion of style in this article centers on the French language, it is a study of multilingualism more properly than it is a study just of French. It enumerates, for example, how Prussians continued to use the German language in dealings with the Holy Roman Empire (which they called *Reichs-Sachen*) and for internal administration that was based on Imperial law.²⁴ Yet it is equally important not to trend too far in the other direction and to treat these languages as passive vehicles for the transmission of information. The choice of French held communicative power in itself; and nobody knew this better than Frederick the Great, who brought French books to his battlefields even as he remained a frequent and bitter enemy of the Bourbon kings.

Frederick’s Prussia had an important motivation for its widespread adoption of French; it was still in the process of becoming a major European power. While both the dynasty and the state had earlier origins – the Dukes of Prussia had ruled from Königsberg since the sixteenth century, and had entered a personal union with Brandenburg in 1618 – the ruler, Frederick III/I (reigned 1688–1713) had only declared himself a fully-fledged monarch, or “King in Prussia,” in 1701.²⁵ The composite state of Brandenburg-Prussia (henceforth simply “Prussia”) continued to grow throughout the eighteenth century, catapulting from a minor principality at the outer edges of Central Europe to one of the five Great Powers that dominated European politics from the mid-eighteenth century through to the First World War, unifying the German nation under its rule in the process.²⁶

While Prussia’s situation was similar to that of many Francophile principalities in northern Germany, it differed from that of the Habsburg Empire in Vienna: an established power whose pomp and splendor rivalled the French royal court at Versailles.²⁷ Not only was Vienna home to a countervailing form of architecture, inspired by the Italian Baroque, the Habsburgs’ commanding position at the head of the Holy Roman Empire further encouraged the use of both Latin and

language to a universalist European culture. Jacques, “Louis-Antoine Caraccioli: Une certaine vision de l’Europe française.”

²¹ The term “French Europe” is associated today with a nationally-centered narrative of European French. See Fumaroli, *Quand l’Europe parlait français*. My challenge to the “nationalist” interpretation of European French draws on recent literature that questions the validity of the concept of “French Europe,” either as a “discourse” (see Markovits, *Civiliser l’Europe*) or as a “myth” (see Beaurepaire, *Le mythe de l’Europe française*). Yet while these authors treat “French Europe” as a myth or discourse, I argue instead that European French was a historical fact that provided for an unprecedented degree of international unification, albeit for a very narrow and uneven upper stratum of European society. For a depiction of this “Age of Cosmopolitanism,” see Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 1–18.

²² Lilti, “La civilisation est-elle européenne?”; and Lilti and Spector, “L’Europe des Lumières, généalogie d’un concept,” 4–5.

²³ Scott, “Diplomatic Culture in Old Regime Europe,” 85–88; and Bély, *L’art de la paix en Europe*, 20–22.

²⁴ Wilson, “Frederick the Great and Imperial Politics,” 1; and Kohnke, “Das preußische Kabinettsministerium,” 99.

²⁵ Clark, “When Culture Meets Power”; and Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 67–77.

²⁶ Scott, *The Birth of a Great Power System*; and Scott, *The Emergence of the Eastern Powers*.

²⁷ Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles*.

German.²⁸ Even as Vienna's monarchs and chief councilors came to embrace the French language and French culture in courtly life in the eighteenth century (the Francophones Maria Theresa and Francis of Lorraine acceded to the throne in 1740 – the very same year as Frederick), the Habsburgs officially retained German as their sole interior language for the treatment of foreign affairs.²⁹

Prussia's eighteenth-century rulership was anxious for status and recognition on a European scale. It also grew rapidly as a unitary and centralized state, which meant that it required new human resources for civil and military administration.³⁰ Cramped by its own limited pool of talent, Prussia had already begun to welcome “noble immigrants” by the second half of the seventeenth century. These nobles supplemented the native landed nobility, the *Junkers*, and worked alongside them in the Prussian bureaucracy.³¹ By the mid-eighteenth century, the turn to French meant that these foreigners (and, in certain cases, their descendants) could serve the Prussian Crown without perfect mastery of the German language.³² This interpretation is further supported by the text of Frederick's initial decree from 1740, which stated that French should be used in foreign affairs “for the prevention of wasteful circuitousness” caused by switching between the two languages.³³ In other words, a reliance on French drastically simplified the language burden of Prussian administration. The *Cabinets-Ministerium* translated foreign letters written in “minor” languages, such as Russian or English, directly into French so that they could be read by Prussian diplomats, and – in a departure from previous practice – sent these reports both to the *Cabinets-Ministerium* and directly to Frederick himself.³⁴ The choice to learn French was not merely an aesthetic preference. It was a necessary skill in a growing “Europe,” where foreign news and foreign information often traveled through the medium of French. It allowed Frederick to play a more direct role in the formation of his own foreign policy.

Prussia's embrace of French was further made possible through its significant population of French Huguenots, Calvinists who had fled religious persecution in France.³⁵ The decades-long influx of Huguenots through the early eighteenth century led to considerable growth in cities like Berlin. Its population blossomed from 10,000 inhabitants in 1680 to 57,000 by 1709, a number

²⁸ The Habsburgs' Catholicism and proximity to Italy further encouraged the use of Latin and Italian, respectively: Petersilka, “Friedrichs II. sprachliches Selbstverständnis,” 210–11; and Braun, *Von der politischen zur kulturellen Hegemonie Frankreichs*, 196–97. On architecture, see Réau, *L'Europe française*, 124–26.

²⁹ Braun, *Von der politischen zur kulturellen Hegemonie Frankreichs*, 196–97. On the French language in Austria, see Markovits, *Civiliser l'Europe*, 126–33; Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles*, 293–94; and Brunot, *Histoire de l'Europe française*, 8: 548–51.

³⁰ Rudolf Braun, “Taxation, Sociopolitical Structure, and State-Building.”

³¹ Rosen-Prest, *L'historiographie des Huguenots en Prusse*, 285–86. “Noble immigrants” is from Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy, and Autocracy*, 61.

³² See Brunot, *Histoire de l'Europe française*, 5: 339–41 and the discussions of Luscius and Destinon below for French-speakers with poor German in the Prussian bureaucracy. On Prussian diplomats from Neuchâtel, see Weber, *Lokale Interessen und Große Strategie*, 334–35. In certain cases, this French-language international labor market also cut against Prussian interests, as Prussian-trained officials could then sell their talents to foreign powers. Rosenberg, *Aristocracy, Bureaucracy, and Autocracy*, 159.

³³ *Acta Borussica*, vol. 6, part 2, 6–7 (see footnote 1 above).

³⁴ For translations into French from English, see the “Acta betreffend den Amerikanischen Händel” (1776–77 and 1778–93), collected in two loose volumes, GStA PK II. HA Abt. 5 (Generalfinanzkontrolle) Tit. LVIII, Nr. 7. On Russian, see the “Policey über Russischen in Koenigsberg” (1783–84 and 1797–1800), GStA PK II. HA Abt. 7 (Generaldirektorium Ostpreußen und Litthauen) Tit. I, Nr. 101. On Frederick's direct role in foreign policy, see Scott, “Prussia's Royal Foreign Minister.”

³⁵ Schunka, *Die Hugenotten*, 6–12; and Roosen, *Hugenottische Erziehungskonzepte und Bildungseinrichtungen im Berlin*, 92–95.

that included about 7,000 “*Franzosen*.”³⁶ Maintaining their numbers in the German capital throughout the century, many became skilled cultural brokers.³⁷ Like their co-religionists in the Prussian exclave of Neuchâtel in Switzerland, they could work in French without the suspicion of being agents of French Catholicism.³⁸ The Prussian Huguenots were given considerable latitude for self-rule in French-speaking autonomous settlements, referred to in German as *Colonies*. This precedent for French-language administration, and the practice of translating and publishing laws in both German and in French, further sped the adoption of the French language as a medium for Prussian administration.³⁹

Yet at the same time, the Huguenots’ dramatic circumstances have led many historians to overstate the role of these migrants in introducing French abroad; evidence suggests instead that they were skilled navigators at the crest of a large wave.⁴⁰ One such proof exists in the *type* of French that Prussian elites adopted: the refined sociolect spoken by court society in Paris and Versailles. Most Huguenots came from areas such as the Poitou or the principality of Orange, where the sociolect of courtly elite French was not widely spoken. The resulting dialect of Huguenot French, referred to by modern sociolinguists as a *koiné*, combined these multiple origins with additional vocabulary from Berlin German and literary expressions from the Calvinist Bible.⁴¹ While many Huguenots could speak and even work in “French,” surprisingly few – perhaps only two to four dozen in all of Brandenburg-Prussia at the turn of the eighteenth century – found employment as professional language masters (*maîtres de langue*).⁴² Prussian diplomats and officers-in-training aspired to speak Parisian French, not the dialect of the Huguenots. They avoided the French prose of the Calvinist Bible, choosing instead to cut their teeth on high-prestige works such as the histories of Charles Rollin or the letters of Madame de Sévigné.⁴³

The gap between elite Prussians and naturalized Huguenots grew over time. While the Huguenots in Berlin retained French as a liturgical language until the Napoleonic Wars, the

³⁶ David, “Les colonies françaises en Brandebourg-Prusse: Une étude statistique de leur population”; and Peter Ring, “Bevölkerung,” in Horst Ulrich and Uwe Prell, eds., *Berlin Handbuch: Das Lexikon der Bundeshauptstadt* (Berlin, 1992), 237–39.

³⁷ On “culture brokers,” see Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 3–4.

³⁸ Rosen-Prest, *L’historiographie des Huguenots en Prusse*, 402. For the Neuchâtelois in Prussian state service, see Weber, *Lokale Interessen und große Strategie*, 143–48. For Huguenots in Prussian state service in the seventeenth century, see Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française*, 5: 339–41; and for the eighteenth-century *Cabinets-Ministerium* see Kohnke, “Das preußische Kabinettsministerium,” 107, 117, 126, and 149.

³⁹ Schunka, *Die Hugenotten*, 83–88; Böhm, “Language Ideology,” 185–87; and Yardeni, *Le refuge protestant*, 78–81. The papers of the French *Colonies* are available at the Geheimes Staatsarchiv: GStA PK I. HA Rep. 122. Their administrative structure is described by David, “Les colonies françaises en Brandebourg-Prusse,” 74–77.

⁴⁰ Rosen-Prest, *L’historiographie des Huguenots en Prusse*, 59–62, contrasts the views of her mentor, Frédéric Hartweg, with a more qualified assessment of Huguenot expansion summarized by Ferdinand Brunot in his *Histoire de la langue française*, 5: 345–52 and 8: 531–32. For further accounts of Huguenots expanding the reach of the French language, see Häsel, “Provinzialismus als geistiger Assimilation?”; Yardeni, *Le refuge protestant*, 177–222; Haase, *Einführung in die Literatur des Refuge*, 416 and 460; and Réau, *L’Europe française*, 276–77.

⁴¹ Rosen-Prest, *L’historiographie des Huguenots en Prusse*, 420–21. On *koiné* dialects, see Lars Vikør, “Lingua Franca and International Language,” in Ammon, Dittmar, Mattheier, and Trudgill, eds., *Sociolinguistics/Soziolinguistik*, 331. On the ways that courtly French and Huguenot French mixed with Berlin German, see Böhm, “Language Ideology,” 202–6; and Harndt, *Französisch im Berliner Jargon*.

⁴² Ferdinand Brunot counted only eleven language masters among Prussia’s 13,847 Huguenot immigrants in 1698–99; using a different method of compilation for the year 1703, he found forty-three. Both are likely slight undercounts. For methods, see Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française*, 5: 348–52.

⁴³ Frederick the Great recommended the works of Rollin and Sévigné in his “Instruction pour la direction de l’Académie des nobles à Berlin,” *Œuvres de Frédéric le Grand – Werke Friedrichs des Großen*, ed. Johann Preuss (Berlin, 1848), 9: 87–98 (document number 91).

group's practical fluency, especially outside of major urban centers, dropped precipitously after only one or two generations abroad.⁴⁴ Some observers, like Voltaire, charged that the resulting *style réfugié* was a bastardized mutation of an already-degraded provincial French. Defenders of the Huguenot dialect, such as Jean Pierre Erman and Frédéric Reclam, pointed instead to its creativity and adaptability in a new context.⁴⁵ Whether *patois* or prestigious dialect, it is clear that Huguenots who were successful in Prussian life – such as the royal tutor Jacques Duhan de Jandun or Frederick's reader Charles Dantal – were able to jump between Huguenot French and courtly French and navigate the differences between these two very different societies.⁴⁶ While the Huguenots may not have single-handedly transformed French into European French, they still set up French-language schools and formed an intellectual community that jump-started the early adoption of French in Berlin.⁴⁷ Many of them occupied crucial positions as culture brokers, roles that gave them both visibility and opportunities for social advancement throughout the early modern period.

The new elites of Prussia – service nobility and Huguenots alike – found that their knowledge of French was in particular demand as the Frederician bureaucracy hoped to form a more professionalized diplomatic corps. Yet a perfect diplomat could not merely be French in terms of language. He also had to be *Frenchified* in terms of comportment and literary style, a code that was both internationally recognized and European in nature. Diplomacy was becoming more professionalized across Europe, building upon an earlier trend of formalization that had continued since the Renaissance.⁴⁸ And as the field became professionalized in the eighteenth century, the *Cabinets-Ministerium* began to suffer from an acute lack of manpower. Entry-level secretaries had historically been recruited with the aid of recommendations received from Protestant preachers and local officials.⁴⁹ Yet this method was not adequate for developing and staffing the highest ranks of the Ministry. The minister Heinrich Rüdiger von Ilgen had proposed a training program for young secretaries on October 26, 1728. He sought to improve the prestige and pay for these diplomats-in-training as a way to compete for recruits against the Prussian officer corps.⁵⁰ However, his death on December 6 and subsequent shifts in the Ministry's administrative structure put a temporary end to this particular venture.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Böhm, *Akkulturation und Mehrsprachigkeit der Brandenburger Hugenotten*, 173; Böhm, “Der französisch-deutsche Sprachwechsel.”

⁴⁵ Rosen-Prest, *L'historiographie des Huguenots en Prusse*, 419–21 and 426–27; and Lifschitz, *Language and Enlightenment*, 161.

⁴⁶ On Jandun, see: Böhm, “Huguenots precepteurs du Prince Frédéric”; Dannhauser, *Jandun, précepteur du roi de Prusse*; and Kohnke, “Das preußische Kabinettsministerium,” 117. On Dantal, see Waquet, *Le Prince et son lecteur*.

⁴⁷ Roosen, *Hugenottische Erziehungskonzepte und Bildungseinrichtungen im Berlin*; and Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française*, 5: 341–42.

⁴⁸ Frey and Frey, “The Eighteenth-Century Culture of Diplomacy”; Black, *A History of Diplomacy*, 116; Bély, *L'art de la paix*, 20; Scott, “Diplomatic Culture in Old Regime Europe,” 59–60; Scott, *The Birth of a Great Power System*, 128–37; and Lindemann, *Liaisons dangereuses*, 89–91. The classic reference for diplomacy in the Renaissance is Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*.

⁴⁹ A call for recruits in this period, issued in 1726 on behalf of Frederick William I, was sent to parish priests and other officials throughout Prussia; the responses indicate that the monarchy sought Protestant recruits, equally from noble or from bourgeois backgrounds, who were “auf frembde Sprache kundig,” or skilled in foreign languages, without specific reference to French. “Nachweis der zu Legationssekretären geeigneten Personen aus Preußen” (1726–27), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV [Allgemeine Verwaltung]) L 4 Fasc 7.

⁵⁰ Koser, “Die Gründung des Auswärtigen Amtes im Jahre 1728,” 184–85.

⁵¹ Reinhold Koser and Meta Kohnke date the re-founding of the *Cabinets-Ministerium* to Dec. 8, 1728, when Frederick William I delivered an *Instruction* to the ministers von Borck and Knyphausen after von Ilgen's death. Ulrike Müller-Weil, however, argues for a greater element of continuity within the institution. Müller-Weil,

Yet Ilgen's proposal was soon revived. A letter from Prussia's three chief foreign ministers to Frederick William I in 1739 outlined a similar program that could train and subsidize "young, skilled, and fashioned people" (*junge geschickte und façonirte Leüthe*) as embassy secretaries (*Legations-Secretarien*) for Prussian consulates. Writing in a heavily-Frenchified German, they argued that a more official training system would follow "after the example of other Great Powers," or *Puissancen*. It would allow for Prussian representation "in the most notable courts of Europe where Your Royal Majesty himself has ministers" and keep state secrets out of foreign hands.⁵² The need for qualified recruits became even more acute when the administrative language of the foreign ministry switched into French the following year. Not only did Prussian administrators now search for recruits who knew the language, it became a proxy for the exhibition of these "fashionable" or *façonirte* qualities evoked in the ministers' correspondence.⁵³ As French gained in status in the Prussian administration, the requirements for what constituted good and stylistic French became increasingly stringent as a result.

It should be noted, however, that the *Cabinets-Ministerium* did not pass seamlessly from a multilingual regime into French upon Frederick's accession. Neither did it immediately revert from French into German upon his death.⁵⁴ While the twin requirements of communication and distinction had led to the use of French for many official tasks with an international orientation, German was still an essential language for an embassy secretary in the early years of Frederick's reign. One reason for this was the necessity for precedent in formulating official documents. While external affairs were most often treated in French, administration internal to Prussia (with the exception of the Huguenot colonies treated in the *Expedition Française*) continued to be conducted in German.⁵⁵ Another area where German retained currency was with the *Reichs-Sachen*, "material having to do with the Holy Roman Empire."

And the need to know German in addition to French was reflected in early applications. Frederick accepted a dossier from a youth from Holland named Luscius; but as Luscius knew no German, Frederick's ministers diverted him from the *Cabinets-Ministerium* to service in the *Expedition Française*.⁵⁶ A similar case occurred with the young heir to a Huguenot family in Hamburg, the Destinons.⁵⁷ The boy's father, Jean Destinon, was the Prussian resident in Hamburg

Absolutismus und Außenpolitik in Preußen, 168–72; Kohnke, "Das preußische Kabinettsministerium," 51–52; Koser, "Die Gründung des Auswärtigen Amtes im Jahre 1728."

⁵² "[A]n den vor vornehmsten Höften von **Europa**, woselbst Eure **Königl. Mt. Ministros** haben, nach dem **Exempel** anderer **Puissancen**, welche solches bishero mit großem Nutzen vor Ihr **Interesse** gethan, junge geschickte und **façonirte** Leüthe zu **Legations-Secretarien** zu bestellen, welche Sich daselbst zu Euer **Königl. Mtl. Dienst formiren**." Podewils, Borck, and Thulemeier to Frederick William I (Berlin, June 19, 1739), in "Errichtung ständiger und bezahlten Stellen für Legationssekretäre" (1739), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) L4 Fasc 10 (GStA PK folders [abbreviated as *Fasc*] are non-paginated but organized by date unless otherwise specified). Bolded letters are written in Latin script (and not in *Kurrent*) in the original. Portions of this letter are quoted by Koser in "Die Gründung des Auswärtigen Amtes im Jahre 1728," 185.

⁵³ It is important to note the hierarchy of qualities exposed by this passage; the term "**façonirte**" was not a simple embellishment, but instead the raw material on which the finer knowledge of Prussian chancery protocol could be later imposed. The adjective, furthermore, was a French root that had been Germanized, and written in Latin script in a way that emphasized the distinctively foreign provenance of the term.

⁵⁴ The Prussian administration used French for certain documents as late as 1859: Horowski, "Le français de cour," 124n44.

⁵⁵ Wilson, "Frederick the Great and Imperial Politics," 1.

⁵⁶ "Geheime Sekretäre und Legationssekretäre" (1739–46), GStA PK Rep. 9 (AV) L 4 Fasc 11.

⁵⁷ "Das Legat Secretarii Destinon: Bestellung und Entweichung" (1752 and 1754–55), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) L 4 Fasc 12.

from 1724 to 1752.⁵⁸ When he died that same year, he left behind his wife, three sons, and a daughter. While two sons had entered the Prussian military, the family's two other children had not yet found a profession or a means of support.⁵⁹ The following description from chief ministers Podewils and Finckenstein shows how knowledge of the French language soon became associated with courtly bearing in general in this period: "He is a young man who presents himself rather advantageously, who seems to have a good deal of acquired knowledge, who does not lack a quick wit [*esprit*], and at that wit shaped by worldly company [*le Commerce du Monde*], and who writes very well in French, and passably in German."⁶⁰

Destinon came from a well-connected family, and his application combined both definitions of French style as covered in the introduction. He wrote good French and had "a quick wit ... shaped by worldly company." Yet in this case, French style proved to be a misleading canard that concealed a number of serious problems. The ministers, in consultation with the King, decided that Destinon's German training would go best if he were placed in an unpaid local post in Berlin.⁶¹ But Destinon did not apply himself to his new job and was passed over for a promotion to the Embassy in Vienna. Things soon went from bad to worse. The minister Podewils implored the Widow Destinon, "in your function as Mother," to order an end to her son's "frequent distractions."⁶² Another of the chief ministers, Finckenstein, grouched that Destinon "haunted the gaming houses." The Huguenot from Hamburg could only be trusted with low-stakes legal briefs and the "simply ... not at all important" letters that the Ministry sent to Neuchâtel.⁶³ Destinon's position did not improve; a tearful letter from June 1755 revealed that he had fled the country deeply in debt.⁶⁴ Frederick II ordered the seizure of Destinon's remaining property in Berlin and blamed the failure on an excessively informal working environment. He proposed to reorganize the Ministry in a way that would allow his ministers to follow the development of its "young men, to keep them on a short leash and to reprimand them well as soon as they do not do their duty ... so that I can make an example of them to correct the others."⁶⁵

Luscius and Destinon were not native-born Prussians, but their ability to speak French allowed both of them to enter the service of the Prussian Crown. The case of Destinon is particularly enlightening in view of his subsequent failure and flight from Berlin. His ability to

⁵⁸ Lindemann, *Liaisons dangereuses*, 87. The elder Destinon was most notable for his role in the controversial establishment of a Huguenot chapel in Hamburg in 1744: Whaley, *Religious Toleration and Social Change in Hamburg*, 127–28 and 137–40.

⁵⁹ Destinon to Frederick II (Berlin, Aug. 18, 1752), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) L 4 Fasc 12; and Widow Destinon to [Podewils] (Hamburg, Oct. 17, 1752), *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Podewils and Finckenstein to Frederick II (Berlin, Sept. 29, 1752), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) L 4 Fasc 12 (contains both rough and final drafts). On the translation of *esprit* as "wit" (from the German *Witz*) see Russo, *Styles of Enlightenment*, 141–53.

⁶¹ Podewils and Finckenstein to Frederick II (Berlin, Sept. 29, 1752), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) L 4 Fasc 12.

⁶² ["Au nom de"] Podewils to the Widow Destinon (Berlin, Jan. 22, 1754), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) L 4 Fasc 12. While the Widow Destinon had dropped a "grand secret" that she would soon remarry – "Je rencontre dans la meme persone le merite la naissance et les richesses [*sic*]" – the projected match failed to materialize and she never joined her son in Berlin. Widow Destinon to [Podewils] (Hamburg, Oct. 17, 1752), *ibid.*

⁶³ Finckenstein to Frederick II (Berlin, June 13, 1755), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) L 4 Fasc 12.

⁶⁴ Destinon had asked to receive the stipend of the recently deceased *Conseiller d'Ambassade* Schlabrendorff on January 25, 1755, but his letter was rejected on February 8. His resignation letter complained of "Les larmes que me coute et ma suite et ces années précieuses de ma jeunesse passées sans le moindre fruit a Berlin": Destinon to [Podewils] (Berlin, June 11, 1755), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) L 4 Fasc 12. Destinon's mother was "surprised" at her son's flight and did not even know where he had fled to: Widow Destinon to [Podewils] (Hamburg, June 17, 1755), *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Frederick II to Finckenstein (Potsdam, June 29, 1755), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) L 4 Fasc 12.

write well in French (but not German) led the Ministry to overestimate his courtliness and his capacity for hard work – a trait that they described as “*esprit*.” The behavioral codes of European court society had helped to develop this particular natural and intimate style of expression; a style that demonstrated internalized self-discipline as well as a sense of urbane cultivation, the ability to write with a light feather and to cut a good figure in the world.⁶⁶ Over time, the increasingly integrated European system of courts came to express this style through the French language – which accordingly came to play an increasingly strict role in the recruitment process of the *Cabinets-Ministerium*.

In the early years of Frederick’s reign, the *Cabinets-Ministerium*’s recruitment documents showed how a knowledge of French conveyed the intangible qualities of courtliness and good breeding. Truly *knowing* French, however, was not a neutral category. As more Germans learned some French, especially Germans from more common backgrounds, the standard for passable French style was raised as well. The initial adoption of French had favored both new members of the service nobility and upwardly mobile French Huguenots. Yet over time, this more traditional elite reacted to the tide of French primers, manuals, and dictionaries that swamped German markets by emphasizing the need for a spontaneous and conversational style.⁶⁷ This move tilted the scales again in favor of the well-connected members of the older Prussian nobility. It was the acceleration of distinction in practice.

These increasing demands related to style took yet another form at the *Cabinets-Ministerium* as they linked with the need for technical specialization in European diplomacy. Together, these trends led to the new prominence of formal writing samples. These documents gave a more complete picture of a candidate’s skills by showing his technical ability to draft formal documents. At the same time, the samples attempted to communicate, however imperfectly, the writer’s stylistic mastery at a distance. In a society that relied on handwritten documents and admired personal bodily control as a sign of courtliness, the display of mastery thus extended to the writer’s display of skill with a feather pen.

One such document was produced as a part of a job application in 1764. Its author was a twenty-six-year-old Silesian, Christian Friedrich Gottlieb Behnisch. Passed over for an appointment as an embassy secretary in Warsaw, Behnisch proposed to work without pay in the Department until a new position opened up.⁶⁸ The document that accompanied his application, a historical treatise on the relationship between Poland and Brandenburg-Prussia, is a striking example of eighteenth-century penmanship. The perfect handwriting that falls in even lines – German on the left, French on the right – demonstrated that Behnisch could switch between both languages with equal fluency. However, small but significant differences in the texts – compare the opening “*Niemand zweifelt daran, der Krone Polen*” with the French “*On convient generalement, que la Republique de Pologne*” – reveal that the translation is much looser than the visual structure implies. This loose translation adds to the impression that Behnisch’s work is a

⁶⁶ For a description of this process in Germany see Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 15–20.

⁶⁷ For a list of these manuals in Germany, see the printed bibliography in Kuhfuß, *Eine Kulturgeschichte des Französischunterrichts in der frühen Neuzeit*, 653–70; and Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française*, 8: 628–29. On the long-term repatriation of the Prussian bureaucracy, see Rosenberg, *Aristocracy, Bureaucracy, and Aristocracy*, 155–56.

⁶⁸ Finckenstein and Hertzberg to Frederick II (Berlin, May 4, 1764), in “Acta betr. Geheime Sekretäre und Legationssekretäre” (1752–65), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) L 4 Fasc 13, fol. 46 (Fol. 45 is a draft of the same letter).

material artifact as much as it is a document. The form of the object is meant to communicate style as clearly as the text itself.⁶⁹

The ministers Finckenstein and Hertzberg hoped to hire Behnisch for their ministry, and stressed the international competition for good candidates that shaped their hiring practices:

On one hand, the Chancery needs to be recruited for, [the staffing] not being adequate for ordinary work since the departure of the *Sieur* Gregory, employed in Saxony, and that on the other hand it is very rare to find as good subjects as the aforementioned Bæhnisch, who together with [his] studies has good conduct, and who has a beautiful hand, the sort of which we believe we have to enlist for our department, before he looks for his fortune in another.⁷⁰

This commentary is notable for the elision between “studies,” “good conduct,” and a “beautiful hand”: an elision that reinforces trends seen in other documents associated with the *Cabinets-Ministerium*. The increasing specialization that was needed to produce a writing sample such as this one, and the increasing use of French as the medium of diplomatic work, resulted in an increasingly European market for these “language specialists” who could write persuasively in French.⁷¹ An application like Behnisch’s responded to this new requirement for international legibility. It was a document that could be assayed and valued at first sight. While Frederick was initially reluctant to take on yet another secretary without an open post, he ultimately granted Behnisch a paid position as an embassy secretary in Stockholm a year later, in 1765.⁷² Behnisch returned to Berlin in 1772, his health having suffered in the cold Swedish climate. Yet with the minister Finckenstein’s recommendation, he soon gained an even more influential post a year later: instructor to the King’s three-year-old nephew, the future King Frederick William III.⁷³

Behnisch’s masterful writing sample, which showcased his “beautiful hand,” jump-started his decades-long career as an influential servant of the Crown. Yet even as documents such as these came to showcase a candidate’s quality, they never quite succeeded in eliminating the need for face-to-face contact. Candidates would often face a personal examination to confirm the reputation for courtliness and cosmopolitan worldliness that had been expressed through their written materials or through the sponsorship of a family member or a powerful patron. As Frederick the Great scribbled on the margins of another such proposal: “I don’t buy with the cat in the bag. You have to show him to me.”⁷⁴ His ministers referred to the practice as a “*sondage*,”

⁶⁹ Christian Friedrich Gottlieb Behnisch, historical treatise on the relationship between Poland and Brandenburg-Prussia (1764), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) L 4 Fasc 13, fols. 47–52.

⁷⁰ Finckenstein and Hertzberg to Frederick II (Berlin, May 4, 1764), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) L 4 Fasc 13, fol. 46.

⁷¹ For an analysis of a similarly wide-ranging market in talented Francophone actors, see Markovits, “Un marché du travail européen” in *Civiliser l’Europe*, 43–92.

⁷² “Wann sie ein **tractament** dazu geben, gut! Wo nicht, so gehet / es nicht an[.]” Frederick II, Oral resolution (Potsdam, May 5, 1764) in margin to letter from Finckenstein and Hertzberg to Frederick II (Berlin, May 4, 1764), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) L 4 Fasc 13, fol. 46. On Behnisch in Stockholm see Rimpau, “Behnisch, der erste Erzieher des Friedrich Wilhelm III,” 221.

⁷³ Rimpau, “Behnisch, der erste Erzieher des Friedrich Wilhelm III,” 221–22; Reimarus, “Kindheits- und Jugendgeschichte des hochseligen Königs Friedrich Wilhelm,” 10–18. On Finckenstein’s recommendation, see Frederick’s marginal note in the following letter: Finckenstein to Frederick II, Berlin, March 5, 1773, reproduced in *Œuvres de Frédéric le Grand*, 25: 346–47 (document number 12).

⁷⁴ “je n’achete pas chat en poche, il faut me le Montrér / Fr[édéric]” Marginal response to Finckenstein and Hertzberg to Frederick II (Berlin, May 12, 1766), in “Verwendung des jungen Herrn von Schlabrendorff im

literally a “sounding-out” or a survey of a candidate’s abilities. And French was one of the core abilities tested by this *sondage*. When Frederick wished to examine some of the Department’s recruits at Potsdam in June 1748, the minister von Mardefeld listed the most intelligent candidates, and mentioned two with a great deal of *esprit* – but sent the Baron de Goltz and the Lord Haeseler first, “in preference to their colleagues, because he [Haeseler] writes, as well as the Baron de Goltz, French better than they do.”⁷⁵ When a minister conducted an interview himself, his reports would often reference the extent of a candidate’s knowledge in fields such as jurisprudence or European history. But these interviews were also a way to test a candidate on his language skills – and to ensure that he had the courtly conduct necessary to represent Prussia abroad.

But it would be a mistake to assume that the new requirement for technical skills – and good French – meant that the Prussian foreign service functioned as an ideal-typical Weberian bureaucracy.⁷⁶ Prussia’s ministers sought recruits who had good “style,” an ineffable manner of self-presentation that was considered to be perfectible, yet also inherent and innate.⁷⁷ In practice, this meant that many well-born recruits without technical skills were given training to become foreign secretaries; they took precedence over recruits with good skills who could not be reformed in matters of style. This phenomenon can be seen in the Prussian ministry’s training program that responded to the perpetual shortage of “young men of good birth” who could staff their diplomatic posts.⁷⁸ The program, which was officially inaugurated in 1747, was called the *Pépinière*: a “nursery or a greenhouse.”⁷⁹ The institution was closer to a modern-day internship or a stipend program than a traditional school. It taught the new art of diplomacy. The ten noble students in the inaugural class received the title of “Embassy Councilor” (*Legations-Rath*) and were placed at Prussian embassies, either in Berlin or abroad, with a yearly stipend of 300 Reichsthalers.⁸⁰ For context, it is important to remember that the *Cabinets-Ministerium*’s office was quite small. In the year 1747, it had only a core staff of five, with thirty-one “subaltern” employees at the archives and the Chancery (*Geheime Cantzeley*) and an additional thirty-five representatives abroad.⁸¹

The candidates practiced French and other foreign languages. Their exposure to ambassadorial correspondence taught them how to construct reports, letters, and treaties, both in French and in German. The ministers recommended books to their young charges: works such as Sneedorff’s French treaty on courtly style or Justi’s manual on the German *Kanzleisprache*.⁸²

diplomatischen Dienst” (1766–67), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) J 16 Fasc 46.

⁷⁵ While the Graf von Hertzberg had the best French overall, Goltz and Haeseler had the best French of the remaining recruits to be sent to the King: Axel von Mardefeld to Frederick II (Berlin, June 10, 1748). Cited in Koser, “Die Gründung des Auswärtigen Amtes im Jahre 1728,” 186–87n5.

⁷⁶ See the discussion of Weber in footnote 12 above.

⁷⁷ On the innate and ineffable nature of figurative “style,” see Eléazar de Mauvillon, *Traité général du Stile, avec un Traité particulier du Stile épistolaire* (Amsterdam, 1751), 1–4.

⁷⁸ Podewils to Frederick II (Berlin, Mar. 10, 1747), in “Acta betr. Die Etablierung des Colegii der Legationsräte” (1747), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) 9 J 16 Fasc 30.

⁷⁹ While the name *Pépinière* itself is French, the general concept of a *Pflanzgarten* also had German origins. Stemming from an ancient metaphor that likened raising students to raising plants, the term gained wide circulation in Pietist circles at the turn of the eighteenth century. Schunka, “Pflanzgarten,” 244–48.

⁸⁰ Scott, “Prussia’s Royal Foreign Minister,” 524; Müller-Weil, *Absolutismus und Aussenpolitik in Preussen*, 182; Kohnke, “Das preußische Kabinettsministerium,” 195–98; and Koser, “Die Gründung des Auswärtigen Amtes im Jahre 1728,” 184–87.

⁸¹ Not counting duplicates: Königl. Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, eds., *Adres-Calender, der Königl. Preuß. Haupt- und Residentz-Städte Berlin, und der daselbst befindlichen hohen und niederen Collegen, Instanzien und Expeditionen* (Berlin, 1747), 35–36, 81–84, and 154–56.

⁸² Jens Schielderup Sneedorff, *Essai d’un traité du stile des cours, ou réflexions sur la maniere d’écrire dans les Affaires d’Etat: Contenant des Maximes à ce sujet tirées des Lettres, Mémoires et Actes publics de notre siècle et*

Letters and receipts also reveal that students loaned official papers from embassies and state archives for their studies.⁸³ The review of previous treaties and formulae, it was hoped, would teach them how to write similar documents themselves. Finally, the time spent abroad would give candidates the knowledge needed to become men “of the world,” or “*du monde*” – a necessity for a career that involved frequent displacement to posts far afield from Berlin.⁸⁴

The historian Hamish Scott has regarded the *Pépinière* as a “failure,” believing that “insufficient potential diplomats came forward” to fill the positions required by the Crown.⁸⁵ Yet the numbers tell a different story – at least in the short term. All ten recruits in 1747 came from noble families, and five of them – a full half of the inaugural class – later became ambassadors or ministers in the Department.⁸⁶ It is true that the *Pépinière* was not a perennial institution. The program was discontinued in the years before 1767 due to the funding and operational constraints of the Seven Years’ War (1756–63). After discussions to re-fund it in 1776–77, it came into existence for another five years from 1787 to 1791.⁸⁷ Even in the years when it did not grant stipends, the structure of the program remained, giving the historian clues as to how candidates were trained for state service throughout the eighteenth century. As Frederick remarked when he accepted two new recruits in 1767: “*Bené* / But make them work so that they won’t be lazy.”⁸⁸ In the decades that followed the initial creation of the *Pépinière*, Prussia’s ministers continued to train worthy candidates with good birth, good breeding, and good French to become secretaries and ambassadors for the *Cabinets-Ministerium*.

The Prussian trend towards educational formalization continued with the foundation of a Military Academy of the Nobles in 1765. The institution, modeled after military academies that could be found throughout Greater Germany, sought not to form promising talent into an elite, but instead to teach these elites the French they needed to become “young gentlemen” and “universal people.”⁸⁹ Prussia was already renowned for its rigorous military education – and true to form as a military academy, the institution was relentlessly practical. Math was limited to trigonometry and fortification. Legal classes read extracts from Grotius instead of full books. As Frederick, ever pithy and practical, put it: “we don’t have the goal of raising Bernoullis or Newtons.”⁹⁰ But French,

acompañées d'exemples, ed. I. de Colom (Hanover, 1776); Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi, *Anweisung zu einer guten Deutschen Schreibart und allen in den Geschäften und Rechtssachen vorkommenden schriftlichen Ausarbeitungen, zu welchem Ende allenthalben wohlausgearbeitete Proben und Beyspiele beygefüget werden* (second edition: Leipzig, 1758). The recommendations appear in Schulenberg and Philipp Carl Graf von Alvensleben to Frederick William II (Berlin, Jul. 14, 1791), in “Dienstverhältnisse der Legationsräte incl. Neuorganisation der Pepinière” (1790–92), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) 9 J 16 Fasc 60 (rough and final drafts).

⁸³ Schulenberg and Alvensleben to Frederick William II (Berlin, Jul. 14, 1791), in GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) 9 J 16 Fasc 60.

⁸⁴ Podewils to Frederick II (Berlin, Mar. 10, 1747), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) 9 J 16 Fasc 30.

⁸⁵ Scott, “Prussia’s Royal Foreign Minister,” 524.

⁸⁶ A full list is provided by Koser, “Die Gründung des Auswärtigen Amtes im Jahre 1728,” 186n2.

⁸⁷ Kohnke, “Das preußische Kabinettsministerium,” 197; Koser, “Die Gründung des Auswärtigen Amtes im Jahre 1728,” 187.

⁸⁸ “*Béné* / Federic / Mais faite Les Travaillér pour quils ne soyent pas Oesifs.” Marginal response to Finckenstein and Hertzberg to Frederick II (Berlin, Feb. 13, 1767), in “Legationssekretäre und Anwärter für den auswärtigen Dienst” (1764–76), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) L 4 Fasc 15, [fol. 2].

⁸⁹ Poulsen, “Anacharsis Cloots at the Berlin *Académie militaire des nobles*,” 559–74. For a discussion of similar institutions in the German-speaking lands, including the *Ritterakademie* in Berlin, see: Kuhfuß, *Eine Kulturgeschichte des Französischunterrichts in der frühen Neuzeit*, 402–12; and Lindemann, *Liaisons dangereuses*, 160–63. For the quote about “young gentlemen,” see Frederick II, “Instruction pour la direction de l’Académie des nobles à Berlin,” 89.

⁹⁰ “Bernoullis or Newtons”: Frederick II, “Instruction pour la direction de l’Académie des nobles à Berlin,” 94. For

in Prussia, was a useful skill. Pupils studied the language for all six years of enrollment; middling students translated Latin works into French to work on their style. Upper students in their final two years continued with French orations and not with Latin ones, as would have been more common at the time; they complemented their studies with readings in French poetry and the fine arts.

The majority of the students from this Academy went into military service; yet these alumni were also quite well-regarded when it came to the diplomatic service. A letter from the minister Hertzberg in November 1786 (to Frederick II's successor) makes such a case:

There is, in the Academy of the Nobles, a young Pomeranian gentleman from the good family of Brockhaus, who seems to me to be quite suited for this career. At the age of 20 years, he has already made good progress in all manners of the sciences. He knows well both history and French; he has an untiring work ethic, exemplary conduct and cuts a dashing figure. He is not rich, but with such qualities as these he will be usefully employed.⁹¹

King Frederick William II admired Brockhausen's skills: good birth, elegance, intelligence, and "an untiring work ethic," put on display by his knowledge of history and French. Brockhausen's application was helped, moreover, by his personal connection to Hertzberg, a fellow resident of Eastern Pomerania who had supported Brockhausen's career since his entry into the Academy in 1781.⁹² Frederick William granted Brockhausen a position in the *Pépinière* with a 300 Reichsthaler salary the next day.⁹³ It was the beginning of a long and illustrious career that took the ambassador to London, Paris, Stockholm, and Dresden.⁹⁴

Brockhausen's story further confirms a number of trends that have been explored in this article. The increasing linguistic standardization of diplomatic work across Europe, as well as the increasing complexity of this work, meant that the *Cabinets-Ministerium* began to recruit well-born secretaries who had a strong sense of French style. This style was both literal – in the sense of a stylistic or well-written letter – and figurative, in that a perfect ambassador expressed the natural poise and controlled familiarity that was characteristic of French culture in the period. Knowledge of the language became a proxy for these intangible qualities. And as the Prussian state gradually re-patrimonialized over the course of the eighteenth century, the diplomatic service became even further invested in the development of well-born candidates. Their recruitment aligned with common beliefs about the nature of French style. While style could not be given to a person who did not have it in the first place, existing style could be polished with adequate training. In Brockhausen's case, the association between the knowledge of French, courtly style, and a

the educational program of the Academy, see Frederick's "Instruction"; and Poulsen, "The Education of Anacharsis Cloots at the *Académie des nobles*," 559–63.

⁹¹ Hertzberg to Frederick William II (Berlin, Nov. 12, 1786), in "Acta betr. die Wiederherstellung der Pepinière des Nobles pour les missions étrangères, unter dem Titel von Legations-Rathen" (1785–90), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) J 16 Fasc. 53 (Brockhausen's documents appear third in the folder, which has a numerotated table of contents but is not paginated).

⁹² Von Hartmann, "Brockhausen, Karl Christian von" in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 3 (1876), 340–41.

⁹³ Frederick William II to the Graf von Hertzberg (Berlin, 13 Nov. 1786), GStA PK I. HA Rep. 9 (AV) J 16 Fasc. 53. A copy of Frederick William's approbation, noted as a "Reponse du Roi du 13. Nobre," also appears on the lower margin of the previous page, which is the letter from Hertzberg to Frederick William II (see footnote 91 above).

⁹⁴ Von Brockhusen aus Groß Justin, *Brockhausen: Ein preußischer Staatsmann*.

strong work ethic therefore ensured the renewed significance of patrimonial connections for recruitment.

It is all very well to regard the application process from the point of view of the ministers as they reviewed the papers of a young Behnisch or a Brockhausen hoping to join royal service, but what did they think of the French language themselves? Prussia's ministers and ambassadors served as stylistic models, in the sense that their writings reflected the flexibility and creativeness of the French idiom. On the other hand, their position was not impregnable. Their insistence on the primacy of style, which they developed through an elite and French-inflected education, was in many ways a reaction to the meritocratic promise afforded by the French language; an attempt to stay on top in a linguistic order that was not quite in alignment with early modern social hierarchies. These men may have had style. Yet even as they exhibited this French style, native French speakers could – and often did – criticize them for their grammatical faults.

As a result, some of Prussia's ministers grew less than enthusiastic about the French language over time, even as they personally benefited from its use. A story about the Graf von Hertzberg provides a prominent example. A member of the inaugural *Pépinière* class of 1747, Hertzberg became one of the chief ministers of the Prussian *Cabinets-Ministerium* under Frederick the Great; he later directed it in the early reign of Frederick William II. He reviewed the French style of applicants to Prussian service, and published his written works both in German and in French. But his language had its limits. A review of Hertzberg's writings was published in the *Journal Helvétique*, a French-speaking periodical from Neuchâtel, in 1782. The burghers of Neuchâtel, a principality under Prussian control, were under Hertzberg's thumb politically; but they could still argue that they were superior in the command of all things French. Their judgement read as follows: "They are written with elegance; but I believe it impossible that a foreigner, however well he speaks our capricious language, would always be correct in the choice of his expressions, of his turns of phrase and of his constructions ... he would have a beautiful and good style more than a correct style."⁹⁵

What did the *Journal's* editors mean when they argued that Hertzberg did not have a "correct style"? Following a term used by Bourdieu, Hertzberg's style was actually *hyper-correct* – he used words in a way that followed their actual meaning, but not in a way that reflected contemporary elite French usage.⁹⁶ As the review put it:

What we call a snowball [*une pelote de neige*], he calls a skein of snow [*un peloton de neige*]⁹⁷ ... and it seems that we should speak in such a way, that the snowball [*pelote*] gathers and hardens between the hands of a child, whereas a skein of snow [*peloton*], detaches from the top of the mountain, grows insensibly while rolling for the length of its path, and becomes an avalanche.... M. de Hertzberg speaks here, then, better than usage demands.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ *Journal Helvétique, ou Annales littéraires et politiques de l'Europe, et principalement de la Suisse* (Neuchâtel, May 1782), 1.

⁹⁶ For Bourdieu, "*hyper-correction*" is a trait that marks members of the petite bourgeoisie – speakers who are familiar with the formal rules of elite speech, but unfamiliar with its informal norms. Bourdieu, *Langage et pouvoir symbolique*, 95.

⁹⁷ A "*peloton*" can be a ball of thread but not a ball of snow: "*espèce de boule que l'on forme en dévidant du fil, de la laine, de la soie, &c.*" *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 4th ed. (Paris, 1762), s.v. "*peloton*."

⁹⁸ *Journal Helvétique* (May 1782), 2.

Elite French speakers in Prussia frequently maintained that style or natural ease was superior to formal perfection. Indeed, Hertzberg looked for this sort of natural ease when he policed French-language applications to the *Cabinets-Ministerium*. But style, for a foreigner, was a continuous work-in-progress, and the burghers of Neuchâtel leveraged Hertzberg's own arguments against him. They maintained that his style was both "beautiful" and "good," but mocked the hyper-correct departures from French usage (such as *peloton* instead of *pelote*) to argue in favor of their own literary superiority.

And Hertzberg was well aware of this situation. He wrote to Neuchâtel's *Société Typographique* a year later in 1783, responding to their offer to publish a collection of articles written under his name. His letter included a short apologia for his imperfect mastery of French: "I do not claim to possess this language to perfection," he wrote. "It is only to satisfy the taste of the King that I use it; but I believe that I write it well enough to make myself understood."⁹⁹ Hertzberg directly criticized Frederick's language policy when he stated that he only grudgingly used French "to satisfy the taste of the King." In part, the statement anticipated his work to reintroduce the German language in the Academy of the Sciences under Frederick's successor, Frederick William II.¹⁰⁰ Yet it is also an admission of Hertzberg's own limits in relation to French. In the inaugural year of the *Pépinère*, the future minister had proven to be the student most skilled in the language.¹⁰¹ He then spent decades policing the literary style of Prussian secretaries and ambassadors-in-training. In the end, however, his admission that he did not "possess this language to perfection" falls in line with the judgement of the *Journal Helvétique* that his French was more "beautiful or good" than it was necessarily "correct." French was a useful signaling mechanism in Prussia because it required time, energy, and intelligence to master; yet even those at the top occasionally struggled to express themselves in a language that was not entirely their own.

It is easy to understand the advantages that Prussians gained through French, both in their intended goals – acquiring a comprehensive source of international knowledge, harnessing a new pool of international talent, and granting Prussia status as a European great power – and through secondary effects: the policing of good French in secretarial applications and the acceleration of distinction that pitted noble speakers against heritage Francophones. As Prussian elites proved themselves indispensable to the proper functioning of the apparatus of the state, they also altered the boundaries of what counted as stylistic French. Both enchanted and enabled by the ineffable qualities of French *bel usage*, Prussia's ministers developed elaborate mechanisms like the *Pépinère* to form well-connected recruits into the urbane secretaries and ambassadors that would be worthy of representing Prussia abroad. At the same time, the quick evolution of stylistic norms excluded ambitious applicants who lacked the social connections to sustain a career in state service. This stylistic control was also frequently contested. Many elite Prussians emphasized that their mastery of French style was a quality superior to grammatical correctness. This left them vulnerable to attacks from native speakers, like the burghers of Neuchâtel, who could claim

⁹⁹ Hertzberg to the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel (Feb. 16, 1783), BPUN STN Ms 1167 fol. 82. Copy of an original letter held by August Eggimann in a private collection; added to the BPUN (Bibliothèque publique et universitaire de Neuchâtel, Switzerland) collection in Sept. 1942.

¹⁰⁰ On Hertzberg's complicated relationship with the French and German languages, see the "Discours, que le Ministre d'État Comte de Hertzberg, Curateur et membre de l'Académie des Sciences, établie à Berlin, a lu dans l'assemblée publique de cette Académie du 26 Janvier 1792," in *Discours qui ont été lus dans l'Assemblée publique de l'Académie des Sciences de Berlin tenue le 26. Janvier 1792: On a ajouté le plan du célèbre Leibnitz sur la culture et la perfection de la langue allemande* (Berlin, 1792), iii–viii. On the history of Hertzberg and the Academy, see, among others, Lifschitz, *Language and Enlightenment*, 191–92.

¹⁰¹ See footnote 75 above.

superior control over the finer points of French grammar, even if they lacked the courtly style that was proper to a Prussian minister.

Berlin staked its cultural reputation on the mastery of French style. It became the primary language of the Prussian state during the long reign of Frederick II. Yet adopting French was a tradeoff that held drawbacks as well as advantages. Most of all, a gradually accumulating series of constant, low-scale attacks – from groups like the printers of Neuchâtel, who ribbed at Hertzberg’s hyper-correct prose – showed that certain elements of the language lay out of the Prussian elite’s total control. Admirers of the regime, such as Voltaire, may have heralded the advent of an Enlightened and Francophone “century of Frederick II.”¹⁰² Yet the language’s superiority was set on an unstable foundation, based on a set of contradictions that became increasingly apparent as the eighteenth century drew to a close.

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¹⁰² When Voltaire declared the advent of a *siècle de Frédéric II* in 1742, it was in reference to his work *Le siècle de Louis XIV* and the ruler who had done much to define the course of the seventeenth century. On the subsequent history of the term *Siècle de Frédéric II*, see: Braun, *Von der politischen our kulturellen Hegemonies Frankreichs*, 128; and Schröder, “*Siècle de Frédéric II*” und “*Zeitalter der Aufklärung*.”

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