



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 2. From Absolutism to Napoleon, 1648-1815

Joseph Görres on the Dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire (c. 1806)

Joseph Görres mocks conservative regrets at the Empire's passing and, in an expression of early liberal-democratic nationalism, invokes a revolutionary future for "our nation."

Weep, Germania, weep! Your guardian spirit has abandoned you; caution has removed him to higher spheres, and he will now find in the archives of heaven full satisfaction for his antiquarian mind. What will now guard you against the irruption of the stream of that all-smashing revolutionary wrath? Who will hold the shield before you, lest the fury of the *Enlightenment* devour you? Alas! Ten years will not pass, and you will suffer Gallia's fate; *revolutionaries* and *liberty swindlers* will arise in your midst, and will not rest until they have put the bloody Phrygian cap on you, as well.

Then, O the horror!, they will rip all stars and medal ribbons from the *nobility*, break the coats of arms; all holdings of the *church* will fall into profane hands; all *monks* will be disrobed, all *nuns* unveiled; *councils* and *directors* will take the place of your *anointed heads*, your benevolent, just, humane *princes*. The *peasant* and the *burgher*, which nature actually designated as beasts of burden, will proudly lift their heads and ask about their *human rights*; they will rise up and say: "We are free men; answer for yourselves, despots! Why have you usurped our powers until now?" The guillotine will then chop through family trees in a horrible fashion and strangle the most eminent men. *Dukes* and *counts* will bleed by their daggers, liberty will pollute your lovely climes with its poisonous breath, and misery and woe will reign amongst you. Thus mournful are the consequences of the demise of this *exalted corpse*.

But let us suppress our sorrow, fellow citizens! Let us bury it in the innermost part of our soul, that we might be able to celebrate the funeral of the deceased in all the more dignified a manner. This funeral service shall be celebrated with all the splendor appropriate to the greatness of our nation and the greatness of our loss. Let the German be ashamed who does not contribute his share to this national celebration with his presence and his wealth. *Eight prince electors* will carry the corpse to its grave in full regalia; all other children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, crowned heads all, will follow it weeping and in black dominos; 50,000 flutes will sigh, 80,000 French horns will moan, 90,000 bassoons will whimper. A hundred thousand pits of fire will shout to the underworld about the loss of the upper world. Nature will not fail to drape heaven's vault in black, to stage a solar eclipse and rend mountains. The

emperor himself will deliver the funeral oration, and the Holy Father will celebrate the requiem. Germany's daughters, clad in garments of purity, will wreath the corpse with oak leaves and plant a cypress on the grave. Forget-me-nots will sprout from the ground, and a proud marble will preserve for posterity the following epitaph, composed in true lapidary style and with poetic fire:

*Here lies the Holy Roman Empire,
Breathless and pale,
Cut down by the scythe of death.*

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Translation: Thomas Dunlap