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STANCE

State-Making and the Origins of Global Order
in the Long Nineteenth Century and Beyond

Royal Import

Klas Nilsson

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Royal Import

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Abstract

As a form of government, monarchical rule is today almost extinct. Yet, research into monarchy has recently witnessed a revival, with social scientists making new efforts to understand the remarkable historical dominance of this regime type, its swift demise at the beginning of the twentieth century, and its possible relevance for the world of today. In this paper I take a closer look at a specific subtype of monarchical leaders, namely kings who are invited to rule over a territory to which they themselves are strangers. In other words, I am interested in imported monarchs, and I explore the prevalence and role of this type of succession in nineteenth-century Europe. The paper has three aims: Firstly, it conceptualizes the phenomenon of imported monarchy. Secondly, it presents an empirical overview of all imported monarchs in Europe during the long nineteenth century. Thirdly, it develops a theoretical explanation for why nineteenth-century statesmen were willing, even keen, to offer their thrones to foreigners even as ideas of national belonging and popular sovereignty emerged and gradually came to define political life. This explanation centers on three possible advantages of electing a foreigner rather than a native to rule, namely that such a choice could generate foreign policy gains, reduce domestic divisiveness, and safeguard constitutional arrangements. The study sheds light on a curious mode of succession to high office that has received no dedicated scholarly attention before. In doing so, it contributes to our understanding of monarchical rule in general, but it also identifies a key element of the exercise of political authority more broadly.

Introduction

In the Summer of 1994, Prince Edward, third son of Queen Elizabeth III, received a curious offer: via a letter dispatched to Buckingham Palace he was invited to be crowned king of Estonia. The letter came from the Estonian Royalist Party, which at the time held eight of the 101 legislative seats, and it explained that the prince's "background as an actor and television producer would be ideal to create the majesty a new king would require to combine ancient culture with modern political reality" (Conradi, 2012). Whether the offer was serious or not is doubtful the Royalists were frivolous and anti-establishment (Smith et al., 2002, p. 82) and, in any case, it did not represent the will of the sitting government and the whole affair came to nothing. As for Edward himself, he reportedly considered the prospects of a Baltic throne "a charming idea but a rather unlikely one" (The Moscow Times, 1994).

To most modern observers the idea of recruiting a British prince to become king of Estonia does indeed seem unlikely and far-fetched, yet it is an idea with plenty of precedent. As a matter of fact, we need not look further than Edward's own great-grandfather, who was born Prince Vilhelm of Denmark but became George I, King of the Hellenes, in 1863 after being elected by the Greek National Assembly (Van der Kiste, 1994). The present paper explores the phenomenon Edward came in contact with and his great-grandfather embodies, a phenomenon I suggest we may call *imported monarchy*. By this term I seek to capture instances when a state, by its own volition, offers its throne to a foreign individual who lacks all conventional claims to that throne, such as heredity, marriage, or heroic deeds done in service of the nation. The imported monarch's right to rule is instead to be found in the invitation itself, as proffered by the government or parliament of the state in question. The phenomenon strikes me as odd but also intriguing and deserving of academic attention. Why would statesmen go looking abroad for a royal head of state instead of opting for a native candidate who is bound to have a greater understanding of, and respect for, local customs and practices? What kind of considerations and debates precede the decision to import a monarch and what determines which candidate is ultimately chosen? What are the perceived advantages of having a foreign-born ruler and how does he or she

perform once in office? And do the common people readily accept a non-native sovereign or do they wonder, as does the protagonist in Friedrich Schiller's *The Maid of Orleans* (1801/2006, scene III, para. 33), whether

The stranger king, who cometh from afar,
Whose fathers' sacred ashes do not lie
Interred among us; can he love our land?
Who was not young among our youth, whose heart
Respondeth not to our familiar words,
Can he be as a father to our sons?

In this paper I present a theoretical and empirical analysis of imported monarchy in nineteenth century Europe. I seek to accomplish three things: firstly, I conceptualize this phenomenon in a way that clearly distinguishes royal import from a number of other ways in which a crown may end up on the head of a foreigner. Secondly, I use this conceptualization to compile a list of all imported monarchs in Europe over the long nineteenth century. The results suggests that this type of succession, odd as it may seem, is too ubiquitous to be dismiss as a mere anomaly. Thirdly, I present a preliminary effort to theorize this phenomenon, proposing that electing a foreign-born monarch could possibly generate three distinct political advantages, namely that such a choice could generate distinct foreign policy gains, reduce domestic divisiveness, and safeguard constitutional arrangements. Together, these advantages can help explain why so many states opted to enthrone a stranger even when native candidates were available. In the concluding section I point to some wider implications of the arguments and findings made in this paper and I suggest that royal import represents an extreme expression of a feature that is decisive to all political systems, namely the partial detachment of political authority from society.

A world of monarchs

As long as there has been states there has been monarchs. History presents us with a plethora of titles pharao, rajah, sultan, shah,

caliph, khan, tsar, kaiser, king, and queen – but they all refer to the same basic political figure: a single ruler with life tenure who is typically succeeded by a family member. Historical examples of collective government, non-hereditary autocracies, or acephalous (‘headless’) societies mainly serve to emphasize the sheer dominance of the monarchical form of government (Oakley, 2006; Graeber and Sahlin, 2017). In fact, as late as 1914, as the great powers of Europe geared up in preparation for a first world war, the monarchy was a ubiquitous and quite popular political fixture that was simply taken for granted by most contemporaries. Even to many critics of royal rule, the republican alternative must have seemed ineffectual and prone to instability. For instance, between 1890 and 1914 the French Third Republic had no less than forty-three different governments headed by twenty-six different prime ministers (Spellman, 2001, pp. 231-232). Meanwhile, imperial Germany had only four successive chancellors. This world of monarchs was fundamentally broken by developments just before, during, and after the First World War. Between 1912 and 1922, half of humanity replaced their royal governments with republican ones and while the twentieth century has seen numerous monarchies being abolished, very few have been created or restored (Tapsell, 1983, p. 11). The demise of monarchy has been so swift and so complete that the institution now seems to be not merely behind the times but also more distant and more negligible than it really is. Monarchy has, it appears, been consigned to the proverbial dustbin of history. Yet, the early emergence, universal reach, impressive longevity, and sheer dominance of the regime type clearly make monarchy deserving of more academic attention that it has so far been awarded (Oakley, 2006, pp. 5-7).

The last couple of decades have indeed witnessed a rise of social scientific interest in monarchy and monarchs. Researchers have made new efforts to understand the survival and possible influence of constitutional monarchs in general¹ and the resilience of Arab monarchs in particular.² Others turn to the past and study historical monarchy in order to find clues about the uneven development of modern state institutions (Acharya and Lee, 2015), the origins of the

¹ See Schleiter and Morgan-Jones (2009); Minoves-Triquell (2011); Knutsen and Fjelde (2013); Rees (2013).

² See Kostiner (2000); Menaldo (2012); Yom and Gause III (2012).

welfare state (McDonagh, 2015), the relationship between female rule and belligerence (Dube and Harish, 2017), stability in autocratic regimes (Kokkonen and Sundell, 2014), and contemporary democratization (Herb, 2004; Stepan, Linz and Minoves, 2014). The refound interest in monarchy is also visible the pages of respected newspapers and magazines where we encounter upbeat titles such as “Royal Flush: Monarchies May Be Better For Your Well-Being” (Ames, 2013), “Monarchies, More Useful Than You Think” (Schmemmann, 2014), and most recently: “Democracy is overrated let the Queen sort out Brexit” (Fleischhauer, 2019).

To the best of my knowledge, however, no political scientist or historian has focused specifically on what I here refer to as *imported monarchy*. The individual rulers in question are included in general studies of kings and dynasties and their lives are detailed in biographical works, but they have not been collectively identified as a specific subtype of monarchical leaders. That is what I seek to accomplish here, and I will begin with some conceptual clarifications.

Imported kings and other types of foreign-born monarchs

The rise of a prominent person born in one country to the royal throne of another is commonplace in European history, and as such fairly unremarkable. These rulers are not all of the same kind, however; in fact, I can think of at least five distinct types of foreign-born monarchs, where the rise of each one is tied to a specific set of political circumstances. First we have those who seize a foreign throne by military conquest. Sometimes they put the captured crown on their own head, at other times they appoint a trusted ally or family member to govern in their stead. A prominent example here is Napoleon Bonaparte who was not only Emperor of the French but also King of Italy, Co-Prince of Andorra, and Protector of the Confederation of the Rhine. He furthermore appointed the rulers of four other kingdoms and scores of lesser duchies and principalities (Mansel, 1998; Velde, 2015). A second type of foreign-born monarchs reach their elevated position with the help of international treaties. Once again, the royal appointment is determined by external actors

but the decision is here defined by diplomacy and international relations rather than by military conquest. This was, for instance, how a Bavarian prince ended up as king of Greece in 1832, or how a Rhenish Prussian noble became sovereign prince of Albania in 1914 (Van der Kiste, 1994, , p. 1-3; Vickers, 1999, p. 82-86).

Royal intermarriage produces a third type of foreign-born monarchs. As a recent article in *Foreign Policy* points out, royal weddings are today typically presented as fairy tales come true but they used to serve as key instruments of foreign diplomacy. It continues: “Marriages have always been a method of securing control over family possessions it’s just that these possessions used to include the states themselves” (Evans, 2018). The personal power of the foreign spouse varies, of course; some are powerless consorts while others become full-fledged sovereigns. Catherine the Great comes to mind as a prominent example of the latter. Born as Sophie of Anhalt-Zerbst, she eventually overthrew her husband, Tsar Peter III, and proceeded to rule the Russian empire by herself (Streeter, 2007). And fourthly, as a result of the pervasive practice among the royal houses of Europe to intermarry, the government of a state can also be bestowed on a foreigner through hereditary succession when no suitable native-born heir is available. For instance, when Anne, queen regnant of Great Britain, died in 1714, the throne passed to Georg of Hanover despite the fact that there were fifty-seven closer relatives at hand. All these relatives were Catholics, however, which excluded them from the line of succession, and although a German-born heir elicited little enthusiasm in England he was seen as preferable over ‘one from France’ (i.e. a Catholic) (Somerset, 2012, p. 165).

The four paths to power accounted for so far – *conquest, treaty, marriage, and heredity* – all fall outside the scope of the present paper but they allow me clearly define and demarcate a fifth type of foreign-born monarchs, namely the *imported rulers* who gain their thrones by invitation. This fifth type differs from the other four in two key aspects: the absence of kinship and the presence of a meaningful degree of self-government.

The absence of kinship serves to distinguish royal import from marriage and heredity. Whereas imported monarchs are expected to

have royal blood in their veins,³ they are not personally related to their predecessors or to any native royal house. Bonds of kinship can be artificially constructed, of course, for example through adoption or marriage, but in the case of imported monarchs these are acts of naturalization designed to legitimize their reign and fuse the new dynasty to an older and better established one. For instance, after the Swedish *Riksdag* elected the French Marshal Jean Baptiste Bernadotte as crown prince in 1810 he was promptly adopted by the elderly Karl XIII, an action which Patricia Fleming (1973, p. 232) describes as “an attempt to establish the only sort of social kinship link possible where there was no biological link at all.” And when Prince Carl of Denmark accepted the throne of Norway in 1905, he took the distinctly Norwegian name Haakon VII, as if to connect his reign to that of Haakon VI who had been dead for half a millennium. My point here is that these acts were prompted by the invitation to rule, not the other way around.

The presence of a meaningful degree of self-government, in turn, serves to distinguish royal import from conquest or treaty. The ultimate decision to enthrone a foreigner here reflects national concerns, not the whims of a conqueror or distant bargaining among foreign powers. The distinction is important as it determines where one should look when analyzing and explaining the election of a non-native monarch. Take the aforementioned Bavarian-born Otto of Greece as a case in point: That the Greek state, which had recently fought its way out of Ottoman rule, would be constituted as a monarchy and ruled by a foreign prince was decided by the Great Powers at the London Conference of 1832. The fact that no delegation from Greece was even present (Clogg, 1992, p. 47) underscores that Otto was made king by treaty, not import, and it would therefore make little sense to explain his election by parsing the political debates within Greece itself. It is true, of course, that no state, not even a great power, can be expected to act in a manner that is fully independent of other states, especially not when it comes to a royal succession involving a personage of foreign origin. On the contrary, we should expect that the statesmen who are searching for a new ruler are attentive to foreign affairs, and they may even cater

³ In a circular and self-reinforcing fashion, royal birth “is frequently cited as the major criterion of royalty” (Fleming, 1973, p. 232).

to the desires and interests of foreign powers. But in order for a royal election to qualify as an import, those statesmen or their principals should actually wield some meaningful influence over the outcome.

In sum then, I have here defined the imported monarch as a person

who is born in one country but crowned ruler of another,
who has no hereditary right to the throne, and
who has been elected by the state in question rather than by an external power.

Having established these conceptual boundaries I can now turn to a historical investigation of imported monarchy in Europe during the long nineteenth century.

Royal imports in nineteenth-century Europe an empirical overview

In this empirical section of the paper I present an overview of imported monarchy in Europe between the French Revolution and the Treaty of Versailles and I should first comment on the chosen boundaries of this analysis in time and space. There are some practical reasons for focusing on Europe and on this specific historical period. The number of units to observe is manageable, especially after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and these units can all be said to belong to the same international system which strengthens the grounds for comparison. However, there is no reason to think that royal import as a political practise is limited to modern Europe. In fact, I expect this phenomenon to be quite common both *before* the French Revolution and *outside* of the European subcontinent.⁴ Anthropological studies on *stranger-kings* provide

⁴ The phenomenon should be less common *after* World War I, however, due to the basic fact that while a great number of monarchies have been abolished since then, very few have been created or restored. Within Europe, the exceptions include the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918-1941; from 1929 called the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), the Kingdom of Albania (1928–1939), the Kingdom of Hungary (1920–1946), and the re-established monarchy of Spain (1978-). Yugoslavia, Albania, and Spain were headed by native monarchs, and while Hungary nominally retained the last emperor of Austria-Hungary as its king,

numerous examples of the latter, and I will have reason to return to the arguments made within this field. Having said that, however, I would argue that the political context of nineteenth-century Europe turns royal import into a particularly interesting topic of inquiry. This is, after all, a period when ideas about nationalism and popular sovereignty take root, spread, and eventually come to define political life (see Hobsbawm, 1990). It fascinates me that the belief that a nation and its people has a fundamental right to govern itself according to its own customs and wants seems entirely compatible with the appointment of a foreigner as head of state. Following the American and French revolutions, royal rulers increasingly had to emphasize a personal affinity with their subjects and pitch themselves as “embodiments of national feeling” (Wortman, 2006, p. 120). Yet, Erik Hobsbawm (1990, p. 86) points to the curious realization that “Transnational corporations in the late twentieth century are far more apt to choose their chief executives from members of the nation in which they originated, or where their headquarters are situated, than nineteenth-century nation-states were to choose kings with local connections.” The present paper aspires to provide some explanation to this puzzling inconsistency.

After surveying all sovereign states with a population above 250,000 that existed in Europe between the French Revolution and the end of World War I, I have identified eight that at some point decided to enthrone a foreigner as king (and I find only kings, not queens). A couple of states actually did so twice: Sweden first elected the Danish prince Christian August of Augustenburg to become royal heir in 1809 and when he suddenly died from a stroke a few months later, the royal invitation was passed on to Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, Marshal of the Empire and Prince of Ponte Corvo. And in Bulgaria, Alexander of Battenberg lasted seven years as *knyaz*, or ruling prince, before he was deposed and exiled in 1886. The Bulgarians then promptly replaced him with another noble of German descent, Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha-Koháry. In the table below I list all the cases of royal import I have found, in total ten cases from eight different states, and I also provide some details on country of origin, tenure, and type of exit.

the state was fully controlled by the regent, Miklós Horthy. In other words, no case fits the definition of imported monarchy.

Table 1: Imported kings in Europe from the French Revolution to the Treaty of Versailles

TABLE 1: Imported kings in Europe from the French Revolution to the Treaty of Versailles

COUNTRY	ENTRY	BIRTH NAME → REGNAL NAME	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	TENURE	TYPE OF EXIT
Sweden	1810	Christian August of Augustenburg → Karl August	Denmark	4 months*	natural death
Sweden	1810	Jean Baptiste Bernadotte → Karl XIV Johan	French Empire	34 years†	natural death
Belgium	1831	Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha → Leopold I	Saxe-Coburg-Gotha	34 years	natural death
Greece	1863	Vilhelm of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg → George I	Denmark	50 years	assassination
Romania‡	1866	Karl of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen → Carol I	Prussia	33 years	natural death
Spain	1870	Amedeo of Savoy → Amadeo I	Sardinia	2 years	abdication
Bulgaria‡	1879	Alexander of Battenberg → Alexander I	German Empire	7 years	deposition
Bulgaria‡	1887	Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha-Koháry → Ferdinand I	German Empire <i>and</i> Hungary	31 years	abdication
Norway	1905	Carl of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg → Haakon VII	Denmark	52 years	natural death
Finland	1918	Friedrich Karl of Hesse → Fredrik Kaarle	German Empire	2 months§	abdication

* Tenure as crown prince.

† Combined tenure as ruling crown prince (8 years) and king (24 years).

‡ Romania and Bulgaria were principalities under Ottoman suzerainty until declaring their formal independence in 1881 and 1908, respectively. Ottoman rule was only nominal, however, which is why I include the earlier period here.

§ Tenure as king-elect.

At first glance there seem to be no obvious commonality between the ‘importing countries’ in the list. Some are old, established monarchies (e.g. Sweden, Spain), others are newly created ones (e.g. Belgium, Romania). They are literally located in all corners of Europe, which implies that this is not a regional phenomenon. What is more, while we could hypothesize that the decisions of both Sweden and Norway to elect a prince from neighboring Denmark was based on a sense of shared culture and history, the fact that Greece did the same speaks against this. It could certainly be that a shared culture was important in some cases but not in others. There are two commonalities between these states that do seem significant, however. First, none of the eight can be characterized as a great power, at least not at the time of their royal import. Second, all of them experienced major political disruptions just before they decided to elect foreign-born rulers (c.f. Fernández-Armesto, 2008); Belgium, Bulgaria, Norway, and Finland did so immediately after declaring their national independence and in all other cases the decision was preceded by a political and economic crisis and a coup d’état. Both Sweden and Spain went through proper revolutions, in 1809 and 1868 respectively. Taken together, these two commonalities would seem to suggest that importing a monarch is a recourse for states that are externally weak and internally unstable. I will later propose that the preference for foreign-born rulers can possibly be

explained by the strategic advantages such a choice could generate but it is important to keep in mind that all such recruitments took place in desperate times. This should not surprise, however: absent any revolutionary crisis, we can assume that monarchical states would either prefer to retain their current ruler, or oversee a peaceful succession of power within the established dynasty.

Shifting our attention to the monarchs themselves we can note that in some cases the import can be deemed successful, at least in the sense that the invited rulers had very long tenures: Georg I of Greece and Haakon VII of Norway, for example, both stayed in power for half a century (although the former did in the end fall to an assassin's bullet). But as a contrast we have Amadeo I of Spain who abdicated his throne after two miserable years defined by periodic uprisings, constant conspiracies, and one attempted assassination (Whitehouse, 1897), or Fredrik Kaarle who was entreated to relinquish his Finnish crown before it had even been put on his head (Nash, 2012). All in all, however, the mean tenure for the entire group of imported monarchs amounts to about 24 years, which is noteworthy. In Kokkonen and Sundell's (2014, p. 445) dataset, which covers the reigns of 961 European monarchs over 800 years, the mean tenure is no more than 16.3 years, and in their subset of elected monarchs that mean drops to 12.4 years.⁵ It is true that Europe suffered relatively few international conflicts after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, which might have promoted longer tenures, but it is nonetheless intriguing that these foreign-born rulers managed to stay on their thrones almost twice as long as other elected monarchs in European history.

The most obvious commonality between the rulers in the table concerns their territorial origins. It seems that princes from Germany and Denmark were particularly popular among statesmen in search of a foreign head of state as eight of the ten identified cases involves a recruitment from these countries. The Greek case provides one possible explanation for why that is. In 1862, the Greeks were asked to elect a new head of state via a popular referendum and it turned out that Prince Alfred of England had received more than 95 per cent

⁵ The mean age at ascension for the ten imported monarchs is 33.5, which is higher than Kokkonen and Sundell's mean of 30.4. In other words, the kings reviewed here did not receive their thrones at an unusually young age.

of the votes. Despite this crushing majority his election was rendered impossible by an article in the London Protocol of 1832 which explicitly barred members of the reigning houses of England, France, and Russia from ascending the Greek throne. The choice eventually fell on the Danish Prince Vilhelm instead, who had received only six votes compared to Alfred's 230,000 (Finlay, 1877, p. 286). The case demonstrates that states in search of a new monarch could not always get the candidate they preferred but instead had to settle for one who was acceptable to the Great Powers. Denmark and especially Germany had princes in abundance who seems to have passed this test, and this would at the same time explain why we see no royal imports from England, Russia, or Austria-Hungary, and only one from France. Having said that, it appears that the territorial origin of these individuals may have been less important than their dynastic connections. Alexander of Battenberg, for instance, was the second son of Prince Alexander of Hesse and by Rhine but what arguably mattered more to the Bulgarians was that he was nephew to Russia's Tsar Alexander II. Similarly, George I of Greece was not merely the son of the heir-presumptive to the throne of Denmark but also brother-in-law to the heir-apparent to the British throne.⁶ Sweden's election of Bernadotte is unique in the sense that the new crown prince lacked a noble birth, let alone a royal one. Bernadotte's proximity to Napoleon was decisive, however, and he was also married to the sister-in-law of Napoleon's brother Joseph, the appointed King of Spain (Barton, 1921).

Finally, little can be said about the way in which these kings exited their office: half of them ruled until they died of natural causes, three abdicated, one was deposed, and one was assassinated.

Toward a theory of imported monarchy

I have so far attempted to clarify what royal import is, followed by an investigation of its prevalence in nineteenth-century Europe. In doing so I have also pointed to some factors that may be significant,

⁶ He later became brother-in-law also to the Russian tsar, which underscores the extraordinary connections of the Danish royal family and explains how his father earned the epithet 'Europe's father-in-law' (Aronson, 2014).

such as having a weak position in the international system and experiencing political disruption at home. This hardly amounts to a theory of royal import, however, as it does not explain why statesmen and voters were interested in foreigners to begin with. Another look at the Greek head-of-state referendum of 1862 can provide some hints: First, we can note that the referendum included only one native candidate, Prince Ypsilantis, who received six votes, and a proposal to set up a republican regime rather than a monarchical one attracted 93 (out of a total of 241,202 votes cast). In other words, the alternatives were there but not the popular support. More important, however, are the reasons for rejecting a native head-of-state. According to a near-contemporary analysis by George Finlay the results demonstrated a clear preference for “impartiality” over “local knowledge and personal experience”:

No public man in Greece possessed either the moral influence or the talents, which offered a guarantee for his being able to govern otherwise than as a party leader. - - - Public opinion declared emphatically that Greece wanted a foreign king who could govern as well as reign, for they expected him to control the executive administration, and prevent every officer of the government from abusing the power with which he was entrusted, and from conniving at the abuse of power by his partizans. (Finlay, 1877, p. 287-288)

And here we may begin to unravel the puzzle of imported monarchy. My approach is straightforward: I posit that the reason why so many states enthroned foreign-born rulers is to be found in the perceived political advantages of doing so. In this part of the paper I will outline a theory of imported monarchy where I discuss three possible advantages, all of which are specifically tied to the ‘foreignness’ of the chosen ruler. I should first clarify, however, that by focusing on advantages I do not seek to minimize the costs or risks involved here. As I have already noted, royal import seems to take place only in times of crisis, either when an established line of succession have been upset or, as in the case of the newly independent nations, when such a line are yet to be established. While such crises open up windows of opportunity they also represent periods of great peril for a state. What is more, the personal qualities and ambitions of the foreign prince cannot be fully known; he is a relatively empty canvas onto which statesmen can project their hopes and expectations, but significant uncertainties are attached to their choice. The decision to

import a ruler from abroad is therefore best conceived of as a risky gamble. Such a conception is supported by the fact that all instances of royal import identified above were supposed to be a one-time solution to a situation of uncertain succession: the elected rulers were all supposed to found a new royal dynasty with hereditary principles of succession. With that said I now turn to the possible advantages.

Foreign policy gains.

My first proposition is that royal import could be motivated by foreign policy considerations. To begin with, the choice of candidate may be shaped by external pressure, although such pressure need not generate a uniform outcome. Whereas some states might respond with accommodations, other would resist. And as I have already noted, the dearth of monarchs imported from major powers seems to imply that balancing was a common strategy: electing a 'neutral' prince from a German principality or from Denmark may have been a prudent choice with a low risk of causing dispute.

Even in the relative absence of direct external pressure, royal import may be motivated by the anticipation of foreign policy dividends. A prince recruited from abroad has dynastic ties and personal networks that can be used by a state to reach some desirable objective of national interest. Natural objectives would include national aggrandizement, enhancement of state security, alliance-promotion, and peace-keeping, just to mention a few. According to this argument, royal import may have had political functions quite similar to those of royal intermarriage: both could serve as strategic instruments of diplomacy (Fleming, 1973; Fichtner, 1976). And just as the personal relationship between the royal couple was bound to be less important than the interdynastic union their marriage represented, the personal qualities and experience of the imported ruler may have been overshadowed by the connections he carried. I suggest that those connections must be studied if one wants to make sense of royal import as a phenomenon.

Sweden's election of the Danish prince Christian August of Agutenberg in 1809 can help illustrate this first proposition. At the time of his nomination, Christian August served as governor-general of Norway and he was commander-in-chief of the Norwegian part of the Danish armed forces, which was at this very time fighting a war against Sweden. In other words, not only did the Swedes look to

Denmark, their old archenemy, for a royal heir; they did so during a state of war! The behavior was strategic, however, and the interest in Christian August was all about foreign policy. Christian August was initially the chosen candidate of Colonel Adlersparre, who was the key leader of the 1809 revolution, and by courting the Danish commander he hoped to accomplish one or more of three things: First, he sought to give Christian August an incentive to not launch an attack on Sweden. This was particularly important since Adlersparre had stripped the western border of its defense in order to enforce the revolution in the capital. Second, the offer was meant to drive a wedge of mistrust between Christian August and his sovereign, the king of Denmark. And third, it was hoped that the recruitment of the governor-general would induce a rebellion in Norway, where he was well-liked, and bring about its unification with Sweden. In the end, these objectives met with little success especially the third and most important one – but the point is that no explanation of the election of Christian August can ignore the foreign policy dimension (see Sjövall, 1917, and Sather, 2015, for extensive analyses of this case).

Finland's brief monarchical experiment provides a more cautionary tale that underlines the significant risks of importing a foreign prince. With the benefit of hind-sight, the election of Friedrich Karl of Hesse in the Fall of 1918 seems almost unbelievably ill-timed. The government sought to protect the independence of their country by strengthening their ties to Germany but by doing so they hitched their wagon to a falling star. Just one month after the appointment had been made, Germany surrendered and the Entente powers demanded the removal of Fredrik Kaarle (who had not even arrived in his new kingdom yet). This course of events was predicted by the Finnish ambassador in Paris who a few months earlier had ironically suggested that if his countrymen really wanted a German prince, why not elect Wilhelm of Wied, the exiled prince of Albania, “who is already accustomed to being driven away and used to the idea that his bullet is cast. For they should realize, that a Bosch king would not last long in Finland of 1918” (cit. in Jägerskiöld, 1967, p. 286-287, see also Nash, 2012).

Domestic order and impartiality.

My second proposition is that by importing a monarch a state could also hope to improve the order and stability of domestic politics.

Members of domestic elites are often badly positioned to resolve political conflicts and establish peace and order because they have typically played a part in the rivalries that constitute these conflicts. They cannot be expected to suddenly rise above the fray and act in a nonpartisan manner, should they reach the throne. A key advantage of the imported sovereign is that he is unencumbered by kinship or other affinities to existing elites. He is capable of standing aloof from local disputes and this lends him credibility as political leader and dispenser of justice. Paradoxically, a foreigner could thus find it easier to unify the nation than would a native. Even when such high expectations cannot be met, an outsider may be the only candidate enough people can agree on whereas the elevation of an insider would pitch different factions against each other, induce jealousies, and incite resistance. In this case, the advantage of the royal import would be that it does not exacerbate existing political tensions; it could be that the foreign-born ruler is no one's favorite but neither is he anyone's main enemy.

The argument made here is inspired by Georg Simmel's thoughts on 'the stranger' as a social category. Simmel refers to the practice among Italian city-states to recruit judges from the outside and he claims that they did so "because no native was free from entanglement in family interests and factionalism" (Simmel, 1971, p. 145). Subordination under a stranger, he adds, is more suitable to the extent that a polity is heterogenous and factionalized (Simmel, 1950, p. 221).

Inspiration has furthermore been drawn from the anthropological study of *stranger-kings*: According to a type of founding myth that is remarkably common in Southeast Asia and among the Pacific Islands, the origins of political authority can be traced to the mysterious arrival of a stranger from across the seas who becomes king after displaying extraordinary abilities and/or marrying a native princess: "these rulers do not even spring from the same clay as the aboriginal people," writes Marshall Sahlins (1981, p. 112): "they are from the heavens or in the very common case they are of distinct ethnic stock. In either event, royalty is the foreigner." A key argument in this literature is that the stranger-king is seen as capable of taking the edge off local factionalism and resolve disputes in an objective and fair manner. Ian Caldwell and David Henley (2008, p. 172-173) thus see

state formation in Indonesia as originating partly from the need for conflict mediation and adjudication, and in some cases even in the specific need for enforcement of commercial contracts. Strangers or outsiders, because of their greater impartiality and lack of involvement in existing conflicts and rivalries, may make particularly good adjudicators and enforcers, and it is here that the functional link between stranger-kingship and contractual authority lies.

Finlay's comment, cited above, about the preference in Greece for a foreign-born king serves as a good example of how this argument could play out in nineteenth-century Europe (see also Van der Kiste, 1994, p. 1). The creation of the Belgian monarchy provides another: At the time of its independence from the Dutch in 1830, Belgium was a more or less artificial state, existing by grace of an international compromise. As the author of one history book puts it, "Belgium is a country, but not 'a nation'" (Cook, 2002, p. xiii). The south was populated by Wallons, who wanted Belgium to be absorbed into France; the north was populated by Flemings, many of whom wanted to remain with the Dutch. In a superficial attempt to patch over the glaring disunity their new ruler was to be crowned 'King of the Belgians'. But to find 'a Belgian king', rather than a Walloon or a Flemish one, they had to look outside of state borders. The choice eventually fell on Leopold from the small German duchy of Saxe-Corburg and Gotha. Leopold was ambitious and well-connected, but as Paul Belien (2005, p. v) concludes, he was elected, in part, "because he was neither Fleming nor Walloon."

Constitutional protection.

My third proposition is that by importing a monarch a state could hope to safeguard established constitutional arrangements. The argument here is that while a non-native king can indeed be a capable one – as argued above – he should find it quite difficult to turn that capability into autocratic authority. First, remember that the imported ruler's right to govern is not based on birth right or military might but instead on an invitation extended by the polity in question. And while there is a considerable measure of legitimacy and legality conferred by that invitation – especially in this era of popular sovereignty and nationalism – it does not provide a good starting point if you want to evade or usurp constitutional constraints. In short, the invited foreigner reigns by the grace of the people who elected him. Second, such a foreigner lacks a natural

base of support in society (c.f. Greif, 2006, p. 174, 240). From where, and from whom, would this person rally the support for a bid for autocracy? A native-born ruler, by contrast, is likely to have a core group of backers bound to him by historical attachments, kinship, societal status, financial interaction, or geography. Third, the imported ruler may not know the native language and should have limited knowledge of the customs, codes, and procedures of his adopted realm. He should thus find himself at a considerable information disadvantage which makes him dependent on the advice of native councillors

This last point is inspired by an argument by Roger Congleton (2001). All monarchical rulers face significant information problems, he asserts, and they have to estimate how much information they obtain themselves and to what extent they can trust and rely on the information provided by councillors. Since it is practically impossible for a single individual to acquire sufficient information to govern in an effectual fashion, advisory councils are a common feature, even in autocracies. These difficulties are compounded, however, when the ruler is 'ignorant'. In this situation, the role of an advisory council should be more prominent as the knowledge of its members is crucial. Also, "the council's scope for influencing decisions by manipulating the king are potentially larger in this setting, particularly in policy areas where the king remains essentially uninformed" (*ibid.*, p. 198). While Congleton does not specifically consider the rather unique information disadvantage of imported kings, he does propose that "One systematic source of drift toward council domination of policy formation is variation in the talent or planning horizon of kings through time" (*ibid.*, p. 207).

Theoretical support is also provided by the stranger-king literature where it is often stressed that although political authority may have a foreign origin, the native people does not necessarily lose power or sovereignty. Graeber and Sahlins claim that

[native] control of the succession of the king, including the royal installation rituals, is the warrant of the foreign-derived ruler's legitimacy. In the same vein, the native leaders characteristically have temporal powers as councilors of the stranger-king, sometimes providing his so-called "prime minister." To a significant extent, the principle that the sovereignty of the king is delegated by the people, to whom it belongs by origin and by right, is embedded in stranger-king formations. (Graeber and Sahlins, 2017, p. 7)

Native popular sovereignty thus provides the very foundation for the foreign-born king's authority, and by encroaching on this foundation he would compromise his own claim to legitimate rule. The gist of my argument here is that this dependency should protect against executive overreach.

There is reason to believe that the imported kings of nineteenth-century Europe by and large heeded the constitutional boundaries of their reigns and realized the risk of overstepping them. Leopold I of Belgium certainly defended the prerogatives granted to him by an otherwise liberal constitution, and he exploited the grey areas, but he did not challenge his constraints. In the revolutionary year of 1848, the French ambassador said this about Belgium and its ruler:

Her sovereign has always perfectly understood his role as a constitutional king who envisions royalty more philosophically than politically. He has always loyally and openly followed the march of public opinion and scrupulously respected the wishes of the parliament. She has no serious reason to desire a change in the constitution and nothing until now [March 17] suggest that she wants to do so. (Cit. in Rooney, 2005)

In Spain, Amadeo I lamented that the enemies of his reign were not external aggressors, in which case he would have personally led the troops into combat. Unfortunately, “all those who, with sword and pen and speech, aggravate and perpetuate the troubles of the nation, are Spaniards” (cit. in Whitehouse, 1897, p. 228). When beseeched by a deputation of army officers to dismiss the cabinet by force, dissolve the Cortes, and suspend the constitution he simply referred to his pledge to protect and uphold the law. Instead of embarking on a risky coup d'état, Amadeo went for the safer option: abdication.

Finally, in the case of Greece it is told that George I threatened abdication if the assembly could not agree on a new constitution. They complied and from that date on the king “adhered to constitutional and democratic niceties to an extent which surprised his less scrupulous politicians” (Van der Kiste, 1994, p. 21). When a sitting prime minister stressed the urgent need to prevent a rival from coming into power, George allegedly balked: “That depends entirely on the elections,” he replied. “If the people want him they will vote for him, that is all” (cit. in *ibid.*)

Concluding discussion

In a publication from 2001, Bonnie Honig (2001) notes that strangers and foreigners have always been seen as potential threats to the political communities they enter, threats that need to be met by surveillance, integration, and/or expulsion. Her own approach turns this understanding on its head, however:

Rather than “*How should we solve the problem of foreignness?*” and “*What should 'we' do about 'them'?*” (questions that never put the “we” into question and this, surely, is part of their attraction), the question that animates this book is: *What problems does foreignness solve for us? Why do nations or democracies rely on the agency of foreignness at their vulnerable moments of (re)founding, at what cost, and for what purpose?* (Honig, 2001, p. 4)

In the present paper I offer a partial but concrete answer to this question: the explanation for why eight European states decided to enthrone foreigners, who lacked all traditional claims to rule, lies in the external and internal advantages such a decision could generate. Royal import, odd as this practise may seem, can be conceived of as a strategic response to political disruption and uncertain lines of succession. Whether or not the specific theoretical propositions I have developed here are generally valid remains to be determined, of course. I provide some brief empirical examples in order to illustrate the arguments I make and while they add a measure of plausibility to the propositions they do not test them. Such an endeavor would lend itself well to a structured, focused comparison of the cases of royal import identified here.

In my concluding reflections I want to look beyond the phenomenon itself and touch on a couple of wider implications of the arguments made here. First, I would suggest that imported kingship highlights an aspect of importance to monarchical rule in general, namely that all monarchs need to separate themselves from their subjects. Such separation is crucial for the legitimacy of their reign and it is typically established and sustained by physical isolation, elaborate ceremonies, strict rules of conduct, and familiar attributes such as crown, orb, and scepter. These rituals and symbols may seem needlessly complicated, antiquated, and even bizarre, but as Declan Quigley (2005) has argued, this is the very point: if royalty

do not differ from the common man, then how do we know that they are indeed royal? He writes:

Comparison lends itself to the conclusion that a king is only able to establish his credentials by standing apart from everyday cultural rules with regard to speaking, eating, moving, sexual activity and the ordinary rules of kinship (without a 'g'). *Kinship and kingship are in some sense fundamentally opposed.* (Quigley, 2005, s. 8, emphasis added)

Imported monarchy can, in other words, be seen as an extreme expression of the more general need for alienation from the native, the familiar, the common. By studying such expressions we can gain insights about monarchy in general.

Second, I would also suggest that the argumentation can be extended even further: foreign agency can reinforce political authority more broadly, even when that authority is not vested in kings and queens but in the people and their elected representatives. Honig (2001) makes this argument, as does Sahlins (2008, p. 184) when he asserts that “the sources of political power are generally foreign, drawn from realms beyond the self-governing community.” Even in modern democracies, where public power proceeds from the people, we expect that legislation, implementation, and adjudication are carried out in an objective, neutral, and impartial manner. Is it a coincidence that it is exactly these attributes Simmel identifies in ‘the stranger’? In a comparable manner Thomas Gibson suggests that political institutions must be able to *estrangle* themselves from the factionalism and conflicts of society in order to provide the necessary conditions for ordered social life. Modern bureaucratic states accomplish such estrangement “by depersonalising both the holders of political office and the accumulation of documentary knowledge” (Gibson, 2008, p. 319).

The significance of a form of separation/alienation/estrangement is also discussed in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who emphasized its key role at the moment of founding a commonwealth. In *The Social Contract* he writes that

In order to discover the rules of society best suited to nations, a superior intelligence beholding all the passions of men without experiencing any of them would be needed. This intelligence would have to be wholly unrelated to our nature, while knowing it through and through; its happiness would have to be independent of us, and yet ready to occupy itself with ours; and lastly, it would have, in the

march of time, to look forward to a distant glory, and, working in one century, to be able to enjoy in the next. It would take gods to give men laws. (Rousseau, 1762/1920, p. 48)

In the end, Rousseau does not rely on divine intervention, however; he instead envisions the assistance of a stranger, referred to simply as 'the legislator'.

The quote from Rousseau serves as a suitable conclusion to this paper, especially since it opened with contrasting quote from Schiller; where one cautions against the enthronement of a stranger, "whose heart respondeth not to our familiar words," the other questions the capacity of a sovereign people to establish a proper constitution for its own commonwealth. The phenomenon of royal import captures the tension that appear between the two quotes; the tension between the native resident's capacity to understand and sympathize and the foreigner's capacity to be objective and impartial.

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