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### **Power, Dynastic Identity, and the Visual Politics of the Dukes of Prussia, 1525-1618**

In 1525 the last High Master of the Teutonic Order, Albrecht of Brandenburg-Ansbach travelled to Cracow to receive the secularised *Deutschordensstaat* as a hereditary fief from the hands of his uncle, the Polish king Sigismund I. Known as Ducal Prussia, the new state of 1525 occupied a strategically important strip of land on the southern coast of the Baltic and existed for almost a century before becoming the kernel of the modern Kingdom of Prussia. Though a relatively peaceful process, the reconfiguration of the monastic state into a worldly one caused a crisis of legitimacy which was exacerbated by internal and external challenges, such as crippling financial troubles, increasingly powerful provincial estates, and aggressive neighbouring empires. In the late sixteenth century, ducal authority came under new jeopardy as Prussia was absorbed into a composite state ruled by a regent in faraway Franconia. Legitimacy and authority now had to be constructed across geographic boundaries. Faced with these and other challenges, I argue, the Prussian dukes developed potent forms of display to fashion their new dynasty and exercise rulership, thereby using a wealth of visual and material media ranging from coins to castles, and manuscripts to monumental sculpture. I focus especially on the Margrave Georg Friedrich of Brandenburg-Ansbach and Kulmbach, who acted as a regent for his unfit cousin, the second duke, from 1578-1603. As heir to further territories in Franconia and Silesia, the Margrave was an ambitious statesman, diplomat, and patron, whose reign especially reveals the intersection of visual forms of communication, dynastic identity, and political authority.

Ducal Prussia has often been reduced to a transitional phase bridging the cultural flowering of the Teutonic Order in the Middle Ages and Brandenburg-Prussia's ascent to new glory under the Great Elector (late 17th century). Equally, its cultural products have been dismissed for their fluctuating artistic value. By focusing on the 16th century and highlighting the agency of visual and material media, my project paints a very unfamiliar picture of early Prussia. Eliding narratives based on the familiar dichotomy of centre and periphery, I further propose a change of paradigm and discuss Ducal Prussia as an 'open region' (Białostocki) with strong political and cultural ties that ranged from so-called East-Central Europe to England.

Unfortunately, few visual and material sources from Ducal Prussia have survived the ravages of time and World War II. As a result, archival material is the primary source for ducal court culture around Königsberg.