

Signatures and Political Culture in Eighteenth-Century Germany*

David M. Luebke
University of Oregon

Ja manntje wy seulen dy wol sötjes krygen, wiltu nu neet, soo saltu
ons wal bolde naakoomen, of anders seul wy dy wal saast mit welke
op't lyv koomen.

[Yeah, buddy, we'll get you sooner or later, if you don't [sign];
you'll come along soon enough, otherwise we'll jolly well beat you
to a pulp]¹

In the early days of December 1725, a declaration was published in Emden, the main port in the German territory of East Frisia. It protested against a series of decrees enacted by Georg Albrecht, Prince of East Frisia, and his chancellor, Enno Rudolph Brenneysen. These two, it alleged, had abused imperial law to undermine the power of East Frisia's territorial Estates to collect and spend taxes in the county.² The Estates' wide-ranging fiscal powers were ensconced in territorial law by a long sequence of treaties going back to the late sixteenth

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¹ Thus one Peter Lammers to residents of the village of Midlum who resisted signing a "Memorial" that would have pledged them to support the Estates against the prince, according to a denunciation by Pastor Emmius; Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv Aurich (hereafter cited as StAA) Rep. 4 C III b 32, "Bericht des Pastoris zu Midlum Emmii," February 17, 1726. My thanks go to Hilko Holthuis for his help in translating this and other passages of eighteenth-century East Frisian Platt into modern English.

² The definitive account of these conflicts is Bernd Kappelhoff, *Absolutistisches Regiment oder Ständeherrschaft? Landesherr und Landstände in Ostfriesland im ersten Drittel des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Hildesheim, 1982). On Brenneysen, see Ingrid Joester, "Enno Rudolph Brenneysen (1669–1734) und die ostfriesische Territorialgeschichtsschreibung: Versuch eines Beitrags zur historischen Empirie des frühen 18. Jahrhunderts" (Ph.D. diss., University of Münster), 1963.

century; against this backdrop, Brenneysen's usurpations seemed to disrupt an orderly and just relationship between "head and members, lords and subjects" (*Haupt und Gliedern / Herren und Unterthanen*).³ Attached to the declaration was a typeset list of 428 signatures belonging to people who endorsed the complaint and who had pledged themselves in common defense against Brenneysen and the prince (fig. 1). The grievance derived moral urgency from environmental disaster: a cataclysmic flood on Christmas Day, 1717, had killed over one thousand people and provoked a major fiscal crisis.⁴ But what made the declaration most noteworthy were the social identities of its signatories. They were not burghers, jurists, or other urban elites, but the inhabitants of rural villages located in the coastal lowlands of East Frisia. Indeed, the list included people from all walks of rural life, such as Jacob Pierig, a shoemaker in Manslagt, and Harm Aitets, a simple day laborer who lived in Pilsum. The declaration, in other words, registered the opinions of people whose views were not normally deemed worthy of recording, let alone publication.

As such, the list records a fundamental shift in the contexts and meanings of signatures and signature gathering, not just in East Frisia but in early modern Europe generally. Specifically, it marks the collapse of what might be called a communalist understanding of what it meant to affix one's identifying mark to a statement of grievances or political demands. The communalist construction of signatures presupposed a concept of the person that was comprehended wholly in connection with its external relations to kin, community, and structures of authority. Subjectively, these contexts guided feelings of amity or enmity, not some integrated motivational structure or personal "center of awareness."⁵ In altercations with external authorities, individuals disappeared behind the compulsory and protective solidarity of the village commune.⁶ "Be-

³ "Der Wahrheit gemäß sey / gestalt die Quelle alles Übels / und der leydigen Streitigkeiten darinn zufinden / daß man die Accorden nicht will Accorden seyn lassen . . . sondern sich auf die Reichs-Gesetze / wieder den klahren Buchstaben der Accorden, beruffet"; StAA Dep. I MSC 23, fols. 468r–470v, *Einiger Eingesessenen aus Emder-Leerer- und Greetmer Ambt Schreiben an die Kayserliche subdelegierte Commission sine dat. sub praes. den 30. Nov. 1725 so nachero zu Embden gedrucket worden* (Emden, December 1725), sec. 1.

⁴ Manfred Jakobowski-Tiessen, *Sturmflut 1717: Die Bewältigung einer Naturkatastrophe in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Munich, 1992), pp. 270–84.

⁵ To borrow the characterization of David W. Sabeau, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 35. As Stephen Greenblatt argues, not even the body provided a securely autonomous basis for individuality; it was subject to the community's confirmation in that right. See his "Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture," in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore, 1986), pp. 210–24.

⁶ Peter Blickle, "Kommunalismus—Parlamentarismus—Republikanismus," *Historische Zeitschrift* 242 (1986): 529–36, and more recently his *Kommunalismus: Skizzen einer gesellschaftlichen Organisationsform*, 2 vols. (Munich, 2000), 1:142–58.

cause the commune stood ‘all for one and one for all,’” argues Claudia Ulbrich, “an individual male had only minimal ability to act on his own . . . interests or those of his household” once the lines of confrontation were clearly drawn.⁷ Thus a person signed a petition not as the expression of some individually bounded view on this issue or that, but as a gesture of belonging to a community of goods responsible for the equitable distribution of rights and obligations among its members. Together, such signatures embodied the village commune, or *Gemeinde*. Given in this mode, signatures described a constraint on individual intentions and actions, not an expression of personal interests or systems of belief.⁸

The signatures published in Emden were radically different. They put on display the results of a mobilization campaign that had reached deep into rural society, well beyond the narrow circle of enfranchised housefather-farmers who normally dominated local politics and whose signatures were taken to embody the communal will. In contrast to communalist signatures, these were collected without heed to the constraints of franchise and were assembled on the assumption that any adult male, no matter how rich or poor, no matter how well or poorly integrated, could and should give his opinion freely on matters of the day. This postulate, in turn, was allied to an assumption—rarely articulated explicitly but one without which the declaration made no sense—that the sheer quantity of signatures was as likely to impress a reader as their social quality. The signatures printed in Emden were gestures of belonging to a community of opinion that had little or no direct tie to the communal nexus between agricultural production, village society, and political entitlement. They were the personal marks of atomized political actors.

How should we account for this transition? It is a commonplace of early modern historiography to hold the ever-consolidating state, with its “splendid, petty-minded, and pitiless system of notation,” broadly accountable for the formation of the modern individual.⁹ Through its meticulous visitations and

⁷ Claudia Ulbrich, *Shulamit und Margarete: Macht, Geschlecht und Religion in einer ländlichen Gesellschaft des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna, 1999), p. 132.

⁸ Peter Blickle, “Kommunalismus,” p. 535. Within the village, of course, there were many settings in which an adult male peasant could act on the basis of individual or household needs—as a housefather in relation to family and dependents, as a member of the village commune—even in regions where communes possessed little autonomous authority; see Liselott Enders, “Individuum und Gesellschaft: Bäuerliche Aktionsräume in der frühneuzeitlichen Mark Brandenburg,” in *Gutsherrschaft als soziales Modell: Vergleichende Betrachtungen zur Funktionsweise frühneuzeitlicher Agrargesellschaften*, ed. Jan Peters (Munich, 1995), 155–78.

⁹ The phrase belongs to Valentin Groebner, “Describing the Person, Reading the Signs: Identity Papers, Vested Figures, and the Limits of Identification, 1400–1600,” in *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World*, ed. Jane Caplan and John Torpey (Princeton, N.J., 2001), pp. 13–25.

(Unten standt)

Wegens Embder Ambt.

Hinte.

Focke Hengen als Intrefent.
Gerdt Harrems.
Christoffer Guñters.
Claes Peters als Schuttemeester wegens Hinte.

Osterhusen.

Ian vom Gelder Schuttemeester wegen Osterhusen.
Geerd Hindricks. Warnder Hindricks.

Zuiderhusen.

Ian Oeyen. Garbrant Claessen,
Hybbe Meenen Wefst.
Leo van Wingene als Intrefent wegens Zuiderhusen &c.
Ian Dircks als Intrefent van Zuiderhusen.
Claes Hermans Intrefent tot Zuiderhusen.
Peter Cornelys Intrefent tho Zuiderhusen.
Ian Dircks Intrefent tho Zuiderhusen.
Abbe Heyts. Ofebrant Tjaden als Intrefent Heere Lammers (van Zuiderhusen).
Deddo Heeren Intrefent tho Zuiderhusen.
Herman Janfen als Intrefent tho Zuiderhusen.
Bereat Abels als Quirman van Zuiderhusen.

Lopperfum.

Adam Harmens als Intrefent.
Ode Harmens als Intrefent tot Lopperfum.
Acitt Uden als Intrefent van Lopperfum.
Harmannus Claaffen, Praterma, als Intrefent tot Lopperfum.
Frerich Ebben.

Ayſinghusen.

I. M. Lehling, Iacob Jurgens,

Canhusen.

Poppe Janfen als Intrefent van Canhusen.
Jibbe Hindercks als Intrefent.

Marjenwehr.

Hindrick Brouwer als Intrefent van Marjenwehr.

Midlum.

Roelf Jurjens vor Midlum. Geerd Ianffen.
Hindrick Ycken als Intrefent.

Westerhusen.

Ian Alberts von Westerhusen.
Ulrich Jurjens.

Canum.

Hotte Berents tot Canum.
David à Telligh: Schuttemeester.
Werner Sybenfen, Cornelis Esders.

Circquebrum.

Harmen Geerds als Intrefent en Schuttemeester tot Circquebrum.

Woldzedden.

Ian Coerts wegens Peter Beckman als Intrefent zu Woldzedden.
Coert Ians als Intrefent.
Ian Arents wegens Hinderick Tönjes als Intrefent und vor mich selbst.
Aucke Iansen. Harmen Geerds stör.
Willem Walcks.

Twixlum.

Dirck Kryns Oling als Intrefent und Schuttemeester wegens Twixlum.
Ian Jacobs als Intrefent und Schuttemeester wegens Twixlum.
Klaas Alberts Groen als Intrefent van Twixlum.
Iacop Peters als Intrefent wegens Twixlum.
Dirck Eefertz, Aepke Helmers.

Larrelt.

Albert Krynes Oling als Schuttemeester wegens Larrelt.
Andries Harrems als Schuttemeester wegens Larrelt.
Meeno Ulrich Lehling als Intrefent zu Larrelt &c.
Ucke Ockels als Intrefent zu Larrelt, &c.
Samuel Reinders als Intrefent.
Peter Frerks Intrefent. Bouwn Sybens Intrefent zu Larrelt.
Ian Roells van Hooren Intrefent.
Klaes Ubbou.
Ubbe Focken zu Larrelt.
Fieco Eilders tho Larrelt.
Peter Eeffers, Klaas Jacobs zu Larrelt.

Loge-

FIG. 1.—Signatures in print: a page of published signatures attached to a pamphlet titled "A Letter Sent by Several Residents of Districts of Emden, Leer, and Greetsiel to the Imperial Subdelegated Commission" (Emden, December 1725); StAA Dep. I MSC 23, fols. 468r–470v.

**Logener Voor-
merck.**

Sybrant Mienen als *Schutte*
meester
Syben van Bruyningen als In-
trefcent.
Hinderck Hellmers.
Harmen Everts.
Geerd Claassen.

Wybelsum.

Wubbe Lubbers Intrefcent.

Wegens

Greetmer Ambt.

Pilsum.

Klaes Heepkes.
Ian Gaycken.
Berent I. Tjaden.
Detert Remets.
Dirck Staal.
Enne Eggen.
I. I. v. Wenhling wegen Pilsum.
Habbo Richts.
Ubbe Henske Ubben *Schutte*
meester.
Mencko Hindrijs.
Jurren Frerks schuel.
Per Ordre Meene Iargs
Weduw.
Agge Ryken.
Danyel Jurjen.
Wilcke Juijens.
Hindrick Harmens.
Wilcke Hanssen.
Ioest Ianssen v. Post.
Gerrit Ianssen.
Reemt Foltz.
Derck Tiefsen.
Ehme Harmens.
Ian Sybens.
Freerk Harmens.
Freerk Focken.
Reemt Andrefen.
Otte Hayen.
Hindrick Tjaden.
Ehdo Ianssen.
Harem Aeytets.
Folt Ianssen v. Post.
Ian Ioesten v. Post.
Peeter Heepkes.
Frerk Jurrijens schuel.
Hiorick Jurrins.
Berent Berents.
Ede Eelckes.

Manschlacht.

Roelff Ehbels.
Enne Ahrents.
Haycke Erts.
Garrelt Hildrichs.
Ian Focken.
Wessel Mewes.
Haejke Abben.
Enne Dircks.
Ubbe Meinders.
Ehbe Hildricks.
Boele Hilbrants
Ian Wyben.
Ubbe Habben.
Noe Dircks.
Sybelt Geuken.
Heert Ianssen.
Casper Caspers.
Paul Egbers.
Jacob Pirus.
Reemt Weeyts.
Jacob Alberts
Hindrick Focken.
Wolter Ocken.
Ian Tammen.
Ucke Janfen.
Coert Gerdes.
Habbo Ubben.
Weydt Ianssen.
Uffe Klaafen.
Emc Hummes.
Roelf Hanssen.
Onne Gerrits.
Freerk Claassen.

Grothusen.

Warner Ter Braeck.
Nanne Weyers.
Oncke Sibolts.
Baye Bartels als *Schuffem*.
Hinderck Gerds Stöhr.
Sweer Wilcken.
Ottie Sanders.
Geert Luiken.
Ian Evers Schult.
Berent Roelffs.
Ian Alderks.
Hindrick Hindricks.
Adam Harmens.
Berent Ians.
Focke Geerts.
Mencke Eilers.
Hibbe Freints.
Ian Wiltianck.
Ficke Aeyelts.
Doede Hindercks.
Ian Ahnen.

Frerk Hindercks Söhn.
Hinderck Dirks.
Albert Harmens.

Hamfchwerum.

Haye Aften.
Ehde Hilders.
Luicke Gerrits.
Claes Geijes.
Hans Claessen.
Ian Herkes.
Harecke Hindrichs.
Emcke Hayen.
Enne Ianssen.
Freerk Berents.
Harmen Freyts *Schuttmeister*.
Peter Philips.
Auwe Algers.
Mamme Philips.
Tjark Gerrits.
Oefebrent Ians.
Wilbbelt Alberts.

Upleward.

Klaes Kryns v. Ohling.
Philip Herlin.
P. Bourdeaux.
voor myn eigen vastigheid.
Roelff Mannen.
Ocké Peters.
Ian Andres.
Hinderck Gerds.
Heere Bouwes.
Marten Herkes.
Uke Folkers.
Peter Ians.
Ian Lodewigs Pütman.
Harmen Peeters.
Frans Henricus Risus.
Albers Garfets.
Enne Richts.
Hébrandt Otten.
Sibolt Willems.
Enne Alberts.

**Lehrder Ambts.
Wegens Oberlehdin-
ger Bogdye.**

Peter Melcfs.
Peier Onties.
Ontye Aeykens.
Ian Harmens.
Edfe Harrens.
Ontie Onjen.
Ian Roelefs.
Garrelt Hensmans.
Lupke Sibrandts.

Albert

protooled confrontations, the state isolated the subject as a political actor, meting out individual punishments for personalized disobedience, even when the act in question had been the product of collective decision making.¹⁰ In this grand narrative of state-driven individuation, village communes play a fundamentally conservative role, resisting the forces of atomization and obscuring individual action in a fog of collective anonymity. Another commonplace is to link this assignment of roles with a historiographical dramaturgy that identifies cities—not rural villages and hamlets—as the stage on which “public opinion” acquired the status of “the authoritative judgment of collective conscience, the ruling of a tribunal to which even the state was subject.”¹¹ Villages and hamlets, by contrast, clung to an older structure, characterized by a combination of total transparency inside the commune with near-complete opacity toward the outside world. In this connection, “opinion” functioned principally as a tool for the control of social conduct.¹² Only as external forces tore down the walls of communal anonymity, according to this view, were rural people drawn into the public scrutiny of state power and its legitimacy.¹³

This interpretation is inadequate for two reasons. In the first place, it relies on a binary construction of what were highly complex and multilayered power relations: in East Frisia, as in the politically fragmented landscape of central Europe more generally, state power was rarely a unitary and coherent entity but bore down on village communities from many sources at once—sources

¹⁰ This practice crystallized around the concept of the “ringleader” (*Rädelsführer*). See Andreas Würzler, “Diffamierung und Kriminalisierung von ‘Devianz’ in frühneuzeitlichen Konflikten: Für einen Dialog zwischen Protestforschung und Kriminalitätsgeschichte,” in *Devianz, Widerstand und Herrschaftspraxis in der Vormoderne: Studien zu Konflikten im südwestdeutschen Raum (15.–18. Jahrhundert)*, ed. Mark Häberlein (Konstanz, 1999), pp. 317–47; and Renate Blickle, “Bauernkönige in der bürgerlichen Wissenschaft: Eine epistemologische Untersuchung und ein melancholischer Befund,” in *Historie und Eigen-Sinn: Festschrift für Jan Peters*, ed. Axel Lubinski et al. (Weimar, 1977), pp. 13–22.

¹¹ Anthony La Vopa, “Conceiving a Public: Ideas and Society in Eighteenth-Century Europe,” *Journal of Modern History* 64 (1992): 79–116, and “The Birth of Public Opinion,” *Wilson Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1991): 46–55; Lucian Hölscher, *Öffentlichkeit und Geheimnis: Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Entstehung der Öffentlichkeit in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 1979), pp. 105–7.

¹² See Rudolf Schlögl, “Bedingungen dörflicher Kommunikation: Gemeindliche Öffentlichkeit und Visitation im 16. Jahrhundert,” in *Kommunikation in der ländlichen Gesellschaft vom Mittelalter bis zur Moderne*, ed. Werner Rösener (Göttingen, 2000), pp. 241–61, and the theoretical framework laid by Klaus E. Müller, “Die Apokryphen der Öffentlichkeit geschlossener Gesellschaften,” *Sociologia internationalis* 29 (1991): 189–205.

¹³ Andreas Gestrich, *Absolutismus und Öffentlichkeit: Politische Kommunikation in Deutschland zu Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 1994), and his “Politik im Alltag: Zur Funktion politischer Information im deutschen Absolutismus des frühen 18. Jahrhunderts,” *Aufklärung* 5, no. 2 (1990): 9–27.

that could include institutions of corporative representation. In East Frisia, the Estates' rhetoric of support for communal autonomy masked attacks on it that were no less damaging than those of Georg Albrecht and his chancellor. Second, it presents communes as egalitarian, coherent, and strong. But as this article will show, communalism itself was predicated on realignments of power that did not so much diffuse tension as shift it around. Village solidarity, as a result, remained difficult to sustain against competition for access to common resources. We cannot therefore assume that the integrating power of interdependency was always sufficient to withstand such internal tensions—not even in East Frisia, where cooperative action against the threat of flooding had been a matter of life and death since the onset of regionally coordinated dike construction in the eleventh century.¹⁴

The crux of my argument is that a complex interaction of external forces and internal tensions, not binary confrontations between village and state, eroded communal barriers around the person as a political actor. Competition between prince and diet placed communal solidarity under a heavy strain, but it would be a mistake to claim that external pressures alone were sufficient to wreck it. This competition also presented opportunities for disenfranchised groups within village society to enter the public sphere. By generating new frameworks for alliance making, struggles among competing authorities and intracommunal tensions combined in ways that undermined the “collective regime of housefathers.”¹⁵

This article combines the methods of social history and textual analysis to show how these processes were reflected in the transformation of signatures and their meanings. The first section analyzes the institutional bases of communalist signatures and shows how they emerged from a reorientation of rural society and political culture around the consolidated peasant farm, or *Herd*—a process of simultaneous communalization and social stratification in which the Estates were heavily involved. The second section shows how these mean-

¹⁴ On the original communal organization of dike maintenance, see Dieke Volmar Noosten, “Die Entwicklung des Deichrechts in Ostfriesland und Harlingerland von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart” (Ph.D. diss., University of Göttingen, 1930); and Heinz Stoob, “Landausbau und Gemeindebildung an der Nordseeküste im Mittelalter,” in *Anfänge der Landgemeinde und ihr Wesen*, ed. Theodor Mayer (Konstanz, 1964), pp. 365–421.

¹⁵ The phrase is Peter Blickle's, *Kommunalismus* (n. 6 above), 1:76. Among the numerous studies on rural stratification and its political consequences, see Thomas Robisheaux, *Rural Society and the Search for Order* (Cambridge, 1989); Andreas Suter, “*Troublen*” in *Fürstbistum Basel, 1726–1740: Eine Fallstudie zum bäuerlichen Widerstand im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1985); Robert von Friedeburg, *Ländliche Gesellschaft und Obrigkeit: Gemeindeprotest und politische Mobilisierung im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1997); and Martin Zürn, *‘Ir aigen libertet’: Waldburg, Habsburg und der bäuerliche Widerstand an der oberen Donau, 1590–1790* (Tübingen, 1998).

ings came undone. Beginning in 1721, both prince and diet began collecting signatures among the rural population in a manner calculated to destabilize their accustomed meanings. In this process, both sides were prepared to exploit divisions within villages, if that helped them to mobilize resources and loyalties. Just as important, rural folk of all social backgrounds heeded the summons to engage in political discourse. By 1725, nearly all East Frisians were declaring their position on the conflict, some willingly, others not. Either way, the communalist construction of signatures fell into a kind of semiotic disarray from which a new, individualizing construction emerged. A third section describes these ambiguities of context, motivation, and meaning. A fourth and final section widens the analysis to include comparable transformations elsewhere in Germany and argues that no narrative of political modernization in central Europe is complete that does not take stock of the multipolarity of power and the effects of social stratification and political division in village life.

I. THE COMMUNALIST CONSTRUCTION OF SIGNATURES

For evidence of a communalist construction of signatures, there is no better source than the texts of electoral mandates. These represented the communal will to the wider world. Since 1620, all communes in East Frisia had enjoyed the right to send delegates to meetings of the territorial Estates.¹⁶ To establish such representation formally, however, every first-time delegate was required to present a mandate, or *Vollmacht*, that conferred powers of representation and was undersigned by villagers qualified to participate in his election.¹⁷ To pass the standard of territorial law, mandating signatures had to be “above reproach” (*unanfechtbar*)—that is to say, no signatory could be in the prince’s

¹⁶ See the Final Resolution of the Diet of Norden, July 6, 1620, in Enno R. Brenneysen, *Ostfriesische Historie und Landesverfassung* (Aurich, 1720), 2:580–89. Not all villages sent delegates. A complete representation of the rural communes would have produced hundreds of delegates, but in 1617—to cite the example of a particularly well-attended diet—only ninety communal delegates attended the Third Chamber. See Harm Wiemann, “Landschaft und Land: Probleme der ständischen Repräsentation in Ostfriesland vom 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert,” *Forschungsinstitut für den friesischen Küstenraum: Beiträge und Ergebnisse der Kolloquien* 3 (1981): 1–14, here 12. According to Sabine Heissler’s calculations, 35 percent of entitled villages never sent a delegate to even one of the fifty-four diets that met between 1660 and 1690. See her “Die ‘ostfriesische Singularität’: Die politische und soziale Stellung der ostfriesischen Landstände im beginnenden Absolutismus, 1660–1690” (Ph.D. diss., University of Mannheim, 1995), p. 23.

¹⁷ Bernd Kappelhoff, “Die soziale Reichweite der ostfriesischen Landstände im frühen 18. Jahrhundert und das Problem der ständischen Repräsentation,” *Forschungsinstitut für den friesischen Küstenraum: Beiträge und Ergebnisse der Kolloquien* 3 (1981): 15–26, here 21–22.

service, a domain tenant, or under the household authority of a parent.¹⁸ Accordingly, the first order of business at any session of the Estates was to scrutinize the validity of any new mandates and the signatures that gave them legal force.¹⁹ If a mandate was rejected, the issuing commune forfeited any part in that session's deliberations; and because the estates were wholly in control of the county's fiscal administration, the costs of disqualification were potentially quite high.²⁰ Each mandate text therefore presented the estates' managers with an occasion to enforce property restrictions on the right to participate in political discourse.²¹ For the same reason they offer us an opportunity to unpack the semiotic system of communalist signatures and the social arrangements on which they were founded.

Two points about East Frisia's system of representation are salient to the origins of communalist signatures. The first is that it was exceptionally inclusive, which accorded village elites a political heft far weightier than the early modern norm.²² Outside Scandinavia, Switzerland, and the German southwest, the inclusion of cultivators in corporative assemblies was a rarity. But in East Frisia, a stratum of freeholding farmers managed to secure a formal role in territorial politics as the Estates were forming during the late sixteenth century.²³ The right to representation was their reward for making common cause

¹⁸ Nor could any delegate be bound by special oath to the prince or a member of the territorial nobility. See Diet of Norden, sec. 11, in Brenneysen, 2:580–89. Valid credentials also had to be undisputed; see the reasons given for rejecting the credentials of Haye Peters (Hagermarsch) and Hinrich Lottmann (Blandorf) at the *Landtag* held in Aurich, October 10–15, 1715; StAA Dep. I 1417, fols. 22r–66r.

¹⁹ Harm Wiemann, *Materialien zur Geschichte der Ostfriesischen Landschaft* (Aurich, 1982), pp. 60–61; Heissler, p. 24. A “commission of visitation,” usually consisting of two representatives from each of the three curiae, was charged with this task.

²⁰ In addition to voting on taxes, the Third Chamber designated two of six members in the College of Administrators, seated in Emden, which managed all public taxation in East Frisia. The principal levies under their supervision were a head tax (*Personalschatzung*) and a fixed levy against personal worth (*Kapitalschatzung*), as well as indirect excise taxes on brandy, beer, bread, and other comestibles. Joseph König, *Verwaltungsgeschichte Ostfrieslands bis zum Aussterben seines Fürstenhauses* (Göttingen, 1955), pp. 330–46; Kappelhoff, *Absolutistisches Regiment* (n. 2 above), pp. 10–18; Heissler, pp. 11–118. At the close of each fiscal year, moreover, delegates from the Third Estate also attended a special assembly of the Estates called the “Fiscal Diet” (*Rechnungstag*), which inspected the country's finances.

²¹ To judge by the protocols of diet sessions held between 1707 and 1727, the Estates rejected 8 percent of the mandates it scrutinized (thirty-one out of 386). See StAA Dep. I 1410, 1411–1412, 1417, 1430, 1433–1435, 1439, 1452, 1460, 1461/1, 1482, and 1634/1.

²² Kappelhoff, “Soziale Reichweite,” pp. 19–20. For comparisons see Peter Blicke, *Landschaften im Alten Reich: Die staatliche Funktion des Gemeinen Mannes in Oberdeutschland* (Munich, 1973), pp. 439–475.

²³ As early as 1555, the nobility refused to grant a common tax “privately except with the knowledge of all freeholders in the county and delegates from the cities” (. . .

with the city of Emden—then experiencing its brief efflorescence as one of the most active ports on the North Sea—against Count Enno III (1599–1625) and in opposition to a long list of “unbelievable” labor services, tithes, and other imposts.²⁴ Partly as a result of this privilege, East Frisian communes enjoyed wide-ranging powers and privileges—including, for example, the right to elect their own pastors, deacons, and schoolteachers.²⁵ Another consequence was that communal delegates were frequently in a position to influence the outcome of East Frisia’s many internal disputes. Through most of the seventeenth century, to be sure, representatives of the nobility and of East Frisia’s cities relegated communal delegates to a secondary role in the diet’s deliberations. But when the Estates split into rival coalitions—as happened in 1618, 1660, and 1723–24—the rural population and their representatives became ensnared between the mutually contradictory demands of two state-like entities, each of them demanding exclusive recognition and regarding any display of deference toward the other as a sign of infidelity. This was a coercive situation. But it was also potentially quite empowering for communal delegates who were smart enough to play one faction against the other.

The second point is that for all its relative inclusiveness, this system of representation was predicated on complex realignments of wealth and power inside East Frisia’s villages, redistributions that produced ever more precise and exclusionary distinctions between those who were and were not entitled to participate in communal decision making. Through much of the sixteenth century, price inflation and market integration had promoted the expansion of peasant holdings and the concentration of scattered parcels through sale and lease into more or less contiguous farmsteads geared toward more efficient

konden se [vom Adel] privatim nicht hierinne bewilligen, dat communiter gelden soll, sondern mede wethen aller ehgenarveden im lande ock deputerden der Stede); Wiemann, “Landschaft und Land,” p. 5.

²⁴ See special grievances of the Third Estates in 1594 in Harm Wiemann, ed., *Die Grundlagen der landständigen Verfassung Ostfrieslands: Die Verträge von 1595 bis 1611* (Aurich, 1974), p. 28. On Emden’s meteoric rise to prosperity after midcentury and its subsequent decline, see Hermann de Buhr, “Konjunktur und beginnender Niedergang einer Hafenstadt: Emden in der zweiten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts,” in *See- und Flußhäfen vom Hochmittelalter bis zur Industrialisierung*, ed. Heinz Stoob (Cologne, 1986), pp. 161–74; and Bernhard Hagedorn, *Ostfrieslands Handel und Schifffahrt im 16. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1910–12).

²⁵ On the election of pastors see Anneliese Sprengler-Ruppenthal, “Zur reformatorischen Kirchenrechtsbildung in Ostfriesland,” *Zeitschrift für evangelisches Kirchenrecht* 10 (1964): 314–67, here 351–55; Menno Smid, “Zur Geschichte und Bedeutung des ostfriesischen Interessentenwahlrecht,” *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für niedersächsische Kirchengeschichte* 68 (1970): 39–58; and Sibylle Brüggemann, *Landschullehrer in Ostfriesland und Harlingerland während der ersten preußischen Zeit (1744–1806)* (Cologne, 1988), pp. 169–71.

production for sale or export.²⁶ The wealth these trends generated was the social foundation of the Third Chamber, but it was also the source of new and sharper social divisions within the village milieu. In 1543, the chronicler Eggerik Beninga identified farmstead consolidation as the root cause of new inequalities. “That the common man is no longer so well off,” he wrote, “is also because in olden times farmsteads were not so large and the lands were also evenly distributed among the community, so that the wealthiest freeholders (*egenarvede husluede*) had at most 50 or 60 *Grasen* or *Diemat* under cultivation for their own use.”²⁷ The consolidation of holdings also blurred distinctions between freeholders and tenants, as lands held under various terms of ownership, usufruct, and inheritance were merged into larger units of production—some of it leased, some of it allodial. Meanwhile, the inflation of rents generated unprecedented conflicts among freeholders and between freeholders and their tenants.²⁸

Eventually, a solution to these conflicts was found that redefined the relationship between landed wealth and political entitlement. According to an agreement reached in 1611, rented parcels situated within the terrain of consolidated farmsteads were transformed into hereditary leaseholds, which would be considered *beheerdischt*—that is, integral elements of a farmer’s holdings (*Herd*).²⁹ The same agreement codified the right of *Herd*-owners to participate

²⁶ These trends were especially pronounced in the fertile coastal lowlands (or *Marsch*), where contemporaries recognized a near doubling in the size of the largest farmsteads by midcentury from 50–60 *Grasen* to as much as 100; see Friedrich Swart, *Zur friesischen Agrargeschichte* (Leipzig, 1912), pp. 199–214, 224–47; and Harm Wiemann, “Beiträge zur Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte Ostfrieslands,” in *Ostfriesland im Schutze des Deiches: Beiträge zur Kultur- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte des Ostfriesischen Küstenlandes*, ed. Jannes Ohling, 9 vols. (Pewsum, 1969–80), 1:379–491, here pp. 445–50; Johanna Köppe, “Ostfriesische Tierzucht,” in Ohling, ed., 3:166–357, here pp. 189–92, 276–78.

²⁷ “Dat de gemeene man nu so vormogende nicht is, vororsaket syck ock, dat by olden tyden de herde nicht so groet gewest sinnen und de lande ock under de gemeente verdeelt is gewest, dat de alder rickeste egenarvede husluede hebben upt hogeste 50 eder 60 grase eder deymate yn egenen gebruck gehat”; Swart, p. 229. One *Gras* was the equivalent of approximately 0.92 acres, 1 *Diemat* about 1.47 acres; see Jörg Engelbrecht, *Die reformierte Landgemeinde in Ostfriesland des 17. Jahrhunderts: Studien zum Wandel sozialer und kirchlicher Strukturen einer ländlichen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt, 1982), Anhang 3, p. 235.

²⁸ According to Beninga’s partisan account, freeholders attempted both to raise rents and to deflect the costs of taxation and dike-maintenance onto lessors; Swart, pp. 200–203. Cottagers in the administrative district (*Amt*) of Berum complained against the practice at the Diet of Emden on August 10, 1610 (sec. 17); see Wiemann, *Grundlagen*, p. 101.

²⁹ This was the substance of a by-agreement reached on September 28, 1611, pursuant to the Accord of Osterhusen. See Tileman Dothias Wiarda, *Ostfriesische Geschichte*,

in the election of communal delegates to the territorial diet. These property qualifications were further refined and fixed in at the 1620 Diet of Norden, which set the minimum at 25 *Grasen* owned outright (about twenty-three acres), but double that quantum for lands consolidated under fixed-rent, hereditary leasehold (*beheerdische Ländereien*).³⁰ From then on, enfranchised householders, called *Interessenten*, were set apart from the aggregate of domiciled residents, the *Eingesessene*, whose number embraced the whole range of sociopolitical categories: small farmers, village artisans and craft producers, cottagers (*Warfleute*), day laborers (*Tagelöhner*, *Heuerlinge*), and so forth.³¹ Significantly, the definition also excluded all rent-paying tenant farmers (*Heuerleute*) and domain tenants—even those with heritable tenancies (*Erbpächter*)—from the circle of *Interessenten*.³² In strictly legal terms, therefore, electoral franchise in East Frisia was considerably narrower than the usual embrace of communal assemblies, which in the majority of European landscapes extended to include all tax-paying housefathers, without regard to land tenure.³³

All these forces in combination—market integration, social stratification, and the emergence of corporative representation—thrust signatures into the center of political communication, enriching them in meaning and symbolic function. In one dimension, mandate signatures bound communes in a kind of oath to hold their delegate harmless for all damages incurred on the commune's behalf.³⁴ As signifiers of communal authority, the autographs attached to elec-

10 vols. (Aurich, 1791–97), 3:601. Isolated parcels—*Stücklande*—were not included in these calculations, although Swart believed that many of these were gradually absorbed into *Herde* over the seventeenth century, so that eighteenth-century *beheerdicht* farmsteads contained many parcels previously excluded from the local calculation of franchise rights. See also Engelbrecht, pp. 44–46.

³⁰ In East Frisia's poorer sandy hinterlands (*Geest*), which had remained largely unaffected by farmstead consolidation, electoral franchise extended rather more generously to anyone who possessed a full or half hide (*Herd*).

³¹ For useful overviews of territorial law governing the electoral franchise of the Third Estate, see König (n. 20 above), pp. 326–28; Harm Wiemann, "Die Bauern in der ostfriesischen Landschaft im 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert," in *Bauernschaft und Bauerstand 1500–1970: Büdinger Vorträge 1971–1972*, ed. Günther Franz (Limburg, 1975), pp. 153–64; Kappelhoff, *Absolutistisches Regiment* (n. 2 above), pp. 32–34; and Heissler (n. 16 above), pp. 81–85.

³² Thus, for example, the credentials of Eilert Hajen of Timmel were rejected on the grounds that he did not own enough land in his own right and was a "mere" domain tenant; StAA Dep. I 1452, 15r, *Landtagsprotocoll*, March 12, 1724.

³³ Peter Blickle, *Kommunalismus* (n. 6 above), 2:132–53. As Heide Wunder explains, the very inclusiveness of communal assemblies ranked among the principal reasons for their marginalization from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century decision-making processes; *Die bäuerliche Gemeinde in Deutschland* (Göttingen, 1986), pp. 92–101.

³⁴ See the *Völlmacht* from Westermarsch, August 1, 1615; in Wiemann, *Materialien* (n. 19 above), pp. 60–62. See also the credentials for Extraordinary Delegates (*Ex-*

tion mandates were at once descriptive and ascriptive. Taken together, they described the personnel of a housefather elite and documented its collective acts. But the mandating signatures were also ascriptive in that they were considered to express the will of the entire village population, the women and the men, the poor as well as the rich. Both meanings converged in the synecdochic use of the socially inclusive word *Eingesessene* (domiciled residents) in mandate texts to characterize the much narrower circle of qualified village electors, or *Interessenten*.³⁵ Individually and collectively, the signatures depicted in figure 2, a *Vollmacht* from the *Interessenten* of Norden district, incorporated both of these functions.

Behind this semiotic system stood a concept of the household as the foundation of political entitlement, an ideology in which the prince's administration was conceptualized as a hierarchically superordinate *domus*, the territorial counterpart of a peasant household, whose dependents could claim no right to representation.³⁶ This in turn reified a gendered bond between *Herd*-owning and representation: though a widow could own and operate a *Herd* inherited from her husband, as the basis of electoral franchise it remained a politically masculine entity in the sense that only male proprietors could cast a vote and that no male under the domestic authority of a woman could stand for election.³⁷ Such were the reasons given for rejecting Michael Adolph Schroeder's credentials in October 1712: the new delegate was thought to be under the domestic authority of his mother, Enna Lucia Sassen, as owner of the family *Herd*. Schroeder's mandate was rejected "even though [his] election credentials were in the proper form"—a stock phrase that indicated that the participants in his election had all been properly qualified to vote. The diet reversed its initial ruling only after Schroeder brought proof that his mother had deeded "the farmstead and its appurtenances" to her son.³⁸

traordinärdeputierte) from villages in the districts of Emden, Greetsiel, and Norden; StAA Dep. I 2300/1.

³⁵ See Kappellhoff, "Soziale Reichweite" (n. 17 above), pp. 21–23, on the distinction between descriptive and ascriptive representation.

³⁶ I appropriate Otto Brunner's characterization of lordship as a superordinate form of household to describe an assumption of political culture, not a system of production; see Otto Brunner, *Land und Herrschaft: Grundfragen der territorialen Verfassungsgeschichte Österreichs*, 5th rev. ed. (Vienna, 1965); trans. as *'Land' and Lordship: Structures of Governance in Medieval Austria* (Philadelphia, 1992), here p. 211. On controversies surrounding Brunner's concept of the "Whole Household," see, most recently, Stephan Weiß, "Otto Brunner und das Ganze Haus oder: Die zwei Arten der Wirtschaftsgeschichte," *Historische Zeitschrift* 273 (2001): 335–69.

³⁷ Qualified male kin voted on behalf of female farm owners. On the secure inheritance rights of widows in East Frisia, see Swart (n. 26 above), pp. 57–58. On proxy voting for female *Herd* owners in parochial schoolmaster elections, see Brüggemann (n. 25 above), pp. 171–76.

³⁸ StAA Dep. I 1412, fols. 45r–48v, Landtagsprotocol, October 5–9, 1712.

The reorientation of rural political culture around the *Herd* was also coupled with demands for procedural transparency in representation. In addition to insisting on property qualifications, the 1620 Diet of Norden had stipulated that the empowering signatures on election credentials were to be collected in the parish church or some other open and accessible place, not gathered surreptitiously “from house to house.”³⁹ And so it was in practice: contemporary descriptions indicate that in the villages of Nesse and Arle, for example, the *Interessenten* gathered at the church door, “where . . . they carry out an election by the undersigning (*Subscribierung*) of election credentials or other deliberations.”⁴⁰ In this manner, electoral customs kept the circumstances of undersigning universally knowable locally and its outcomes independently certifiable at a distance in time and space. Transparency, then, was the procedural condition both of village oligarchy and of signatures affixed in a communalist mode.

As these rituals suggest, it would be distorting to argue that these laws and procedures excluded all but the enfranchised *Interessenten* from any active role in communal life. Territorial law restricted participation in the election of pastors and deacons to the *Interessenten*, for example, but in practice non-enfranchised parishioners were drawn into the process as well.⁴¹ And of course people experienced community in more than its formal, political dimension: communes were about the exercise of power, to be sure, but, as David Sabean stresses, neighborhood and kin carried far greater emotional charge.⁴² By the same token, it would be misleading to confuse households as patriarchal abstractions in territorial law with the complex reciprocities of marriage and

³⁹ Diet of Norden, sec. 12, in Brenneysen (n. 16 above), 2:580–89; see also König, p. 328; and Heissler, p. 25.

⁴⁰ StAA Rep. 241 B 6, “Beschreibung des Amtes Berum,” 1742. Although the *Interessenten* of Amt Norden convened at administrative offices in Norden town, no princely officials were to be present when votes were cast; Ufke Cremer, ed., *Beschreibung der Stadt und des Amtes Norden in Ecclesiasticis et Politicis* (Norden, 1929), pp. 36–37.

⁴¹ See Menno Smid, “Zur Geschichte und Bedeutung des ostfriesischen Interessenwahlrechts,” *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für niedersächsische Kirchengeschichte* 68 (1970): 39–58. From 1663 on, the minimum qualification for participating in parochial elections was 20 Grasen, not 25 (as in the case of representational franchise).

⁴² David W. Sabean, *Property, Production, and Family in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 101–23; David W. Sabean and Hans Medick, “Emotionen und materielle Interessen in Familie und Verwandtschaft: Überlegungen zu neuen Wegen und Bereichen einer historischen und sozialanthropologischen Familienforschung,” in *Emotionen und materielle Interessen: Sozialanthropologische und historische Beiträge zur Familienforschung*, ed. David W. Sabean and Hans Medick (Göttingen, 1984), pp. 27–54.

family life.⁴³ All these ties and more bound *Interessenten* to kin and neighbors across the barriers that restricted access to communal power and resources.

That said, there is still no getting around the fact that from the 1580s on, the institutionalization of communal representation added political depth to the socioeconomic gap separating *Interessenten* from other villagers. Rights of access to communal goods, including the use of common fields and pastures, were not personal but attached to ownership of a *Herd*. Consequently, only housefathers enjoyed these privileges fully.⁴⁴ During the seventeenth century, conjunctural crisis widened that gap even further. With their property claims secure and rents fixed, *Interessenten* were better able to survive the effects of falling cereal prices than could cottagers and tenant farmers, who remained exposed to rent hikes and the threat of eviction, not to mention pasturage fees for the use of village commons. Social tensions within East Frisia's villages cannot have been smoothed by the fact that pasturage fees often went straight into the pockets of *Interessenten*.⁴⁵

II. DISMANTLING THE COMMUNALIST CONSTRUCTION

The communalist construction of signatures came under tremendous pressure after the Christmas flood of 1717, when agents of both the prince's government and the territorial Estates began gathering signatures from all adult males as tokens of individual loyalty and material support. At issue between the two parties was Chancellor Brenneysen's attempt to assert princely control over East Frisia's system of excise tax collection. As in past conflicts, both sides set about mobilizing the rural population and its supplies of money and political capital. This time, however, both parties resorted to signature gathering and did so in a manner that drew nonqualified groups into processes of political communication. Brenneysen's underlings were particularly insistent on collecting autographs from nonqualified villagers, especially when confronted with opposition from local *Interessenten*. Initially, the Estates' agents tended to gather signatures among the *Interessenten*, whose opinion, they argued, outweighed any simple majority. But as the conflict intensified they, too, began collecting signatures among the lower ranks of village society. As a result, the

⁴³ Heide Wunder, *'Er ist die Sonn', sie ist der Mond: Frauen in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Munich, 1992), pp. 225–34; Ulbrich (n. 7 above), pp. 14–25.

⁴⁴ Anyone who gave up a house also forfeited the privileges it conferred. On this and the monopolization of village commons see Engelbrecht (n. 27 above), pp. 48–49; and Egbert Koolman, *Gemeinde und Amt: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte gemeindlicher Selbstverwaltung und landesherrlicher Amtsverwaltung im südlichen Ostfriesland* (Aurich, 1969), pp. 42–45.

⁴⁵ On the seventeenth-century slump and its effects, see Swart, pp. 209–14.

mobilization tactics of prince and diet alike damaged badly the underpinnings of communalist signatures—the all-important distinction between *Interessenten* and the non-enfranchised populations.

But why gather signatures as a mobilization tactic? A proximate answer to this question is bound up with the judicial contexts of the dispute in East Frisia, specifically the involvement of an imperial judicial tribunal, the Imperial Aulic Council (*Reichshofrat*, or RHR), in mediating its outcome. In August 1720, Chancellor Brenneysen had filed a complaint with the RHR alleging that the Estates had bungled the financing of dike repairs and asserting the prince's right to oversee the administration of territorial finances. This assault on the Estates' fiscal autonomy produced a preliminary victory for Brenneysen on August 18, 1721, when the RHR granted Georg Albrecht the right to "oversee" the Estates' management of territorial finances, subjected all further disputes to the jurisdiction of a "subdelegated imperial commission," and ordered the cities of Norden, Aurich, and members of the Third Chamber to present declarations of their acquiescence to these provisions (*Partitionsanzeigen*), under penalty of 50 Marks.⁴⁶ Brenneysen appropriated this last clause to justify plebiscitary signature gathering on the question of imperial supremacy: in October 1721 and again in November 1722, after the original decree was confirmed, district officers (*Amtmänner*) were sent collecting "voluntary" declarations of acquiescence, not merely from delegates to the Estates or from the *Interessenten* but also from the adult male rural population at large.⁴⁷ The imprecision of imperial laws that determined whether a commune was party to a conflict may have contributed to this fluidity: the rule of thumb was that two-thirds of the "qualified" residents in a commune were needed to make the whole commune party to a dispute, but in practice even this stipulation was handled loosely.⁴⁸ Be that as it may, the RHR had unwittingly created an ideological and institutional framework within which every adult male was summoned to engage fundamental questions of legal order. The result was a set of mobilization tactics that destabilized the basis of communalist signatures in a clearly delineated structure of political exclusions.

Beginning with the second round, moreover, signatures were collected not only as demonstrations of submission to the imperial ruling but also as pledges

⁴⁶ StAA Rep. 4 C III a, 122, RHR Verdict of August 18, 1721. An additional copy may be found in StAA Dep. I, 1371.

⁴⁷ StAA Rep. 4 C III b 1, "Acta die von der Kayserl. Subdelegierten Commission im Jahr 1724 angenommene Partitions-Anzeigen betr." On Brenneysen's divisive intentions, see Kappelhoff, *Absolutistisches Regiment* (n. 2 above), p. 180. For Brenneysen's instructions, see StAA Rep. 4 C III b 1 (draft dated November 23, 1722).

⁴⁸ Wolfgang Sellert, *Prozeßgrundsätze und Stilus Curiae am Reichshofrat im Vergleich mit den gesetzlichen Grundlagen des reichskammergerichtlichen Verfahrens* (Aalen, 1976).

to pay extraordinary head and hearth taxes for dike reconstruction. Thus plebiscitary signature gathering was conjoined to the mobilization of material resources. In this connection, signatures took on the characteristics of a promissory note against the future payment of dues. Given the dual structure of authority in East Frisia, the elision from this to factional pledge making was swift and smooth. The signatures that were gathered in a third round, which commenced in November 1724, were linked with pledges to pay excise taxes exclusively to collectors acting on behalf of the prince, a maneuver that fused submission with conventional procedures for apportioning the semiannual consumption impost.⁴⁹ Such slippage transformed autographs into statements of factional alignment in an escalating struggle, at once constitutional and material, for control over the county's taxation apparatus.

By the time these campaigns ended in early 1725, declarations of submission had been collected from all communes in five of East Frisia's eight administrative districts, and from villages in parts of the remaining three.⁵⁰ Not surprisingly, Chancellor Brenneysen claimed that except for Emden and adjacent districts, the entire county had accepted the imperial court ruling of 1721 and its provisions.⁵¹ This was a gross exaggeration, of course, but one that highlighted the centrality of communal franchise restrictions to the meaning of autographs. In his procedural guidelines for signature gathering, Brenneysen wrote that, in order to preserve the rural population from unnecessary penalization, district officers should consider a village compliant if "not all, but still some" of the domiciled residents, "housefathers as well as others," accepted the imperial decrees freely—a self-serving standard that threatened to break down the monopoly of *Interessenten* by drawing "others" into processes of political communication.⁵² This destabilizing effect was obvious to non-enfranchised peasants such as the inhabitants of Neue Fehn, who cited their own

⁴⁹ For the method of apportioning excise taxes, see *Pachtordnung* of Ulrich II (1631), sec. 6; in Brenneysen (n. 16 above), 2:638–43.

⁵⁰ StAA Rep. 4 C III b 2, "Verzeichnüß derer aus der Ritterschafft, ingleichen derer Städte, Ambter, Communen, auch einzelne Personen, so die kayserl. Allerhöchsten Decretis sich behörig submittiret, sowohl dererjenigen, so aus denen vorigen Ordinair-Deputirten und Administratoren dergleichen gethan," December 26, 1724.

⁵¹ Michael Hughes, *Law and Politics in Eighteenth Century Germany: The Imperial Aulic Council in the Reign of Charles VI* (London, 1988), p. 137. Already in May 1722, Brenneysen presented the RHR with nine letters supporting the prince; the ninth reported on the readiness of the Third Estate to comply with the RHR ruling of August 18, 1721. Closer to home, the submission of Greetsiel district (to cite one example) was officially proclaimed from every pulpit on July 23, 1724; see StAA Rep. 28, 3627, vol. 1, *Amtsgerichtsprotokoll* (hereinafter AGP) Greetsiel, p. 170.

⁵² "wo nicht alle, doch viele Eingeseßene so wol von den Eigen Erbten als anderen"; StAA Rep. 4 C III b 1, Draft Instruction to Officials in All Administrative Districts, November 23, 1722.

exclusion as hereditary domain tenants (*Erbpfachter*) from representation in the Estates as a justification for accepting the imperial ruling.⁵³ But Brenneysen's instruction did not exclude getting assertions of communal acquiescence through conventional channels, when and where the consensus among house-fathers favored it. Such was the case in most villages of Berum district, where declarations of acquiescence appear to have been assembled in the same communal fashion as electoral mandates were generated.⁵⁴ When such consensus was not present, however, district officers typically deployed a majority principle: in the first week of December 1722, for example, the *Amtmann* Christian Eberhard von Specht of Greetsiel district convened signing ceremonies and reported that a "majority" had submitted "amicably enough" (*unstrittig gnug*). To be sure, his plebiscitary tactics sparked intense local controversy. As *Amtmann* Specht dutifully recorded, the Reformed pastor of Groothusen had tried to provoke a walkout at signing ceremonies in the Greetsiel parish church, exclaiming that "as long as I have one warm drop of blood in my body, I will not sign."⁵⁵ Such theatrics notwithstanding, the point remains that Brenneysen's methods invited all males into the public sphere of political discourse, from which they had previously been excluded.

Predictably, the Estates rejected the representativeness of Brenneysen's lists, arguing that none of the signatures on them had been given freely and—somewhat contradictorily—that few of the signatories had any standing to pledge themselves or anyone else. After a round of signature gathering in the autumn of 1722, for example, the Estates sent a memorial to the RHR that condemned the low rank or dependent status of signatories to declarations of submission. District officers, it alleged, had "grazed among the simple folk in a manner unheard-of in a well-ordered Republic."⁵⁶ In the Friedeburg district, for example, officials were accused of collecting signatures from "destitute people" and "all manner of rabble (*allerhand Gesindel*), even well-known beggars . . . and Jews"; in Leer district they were supposed to have collected

⁵³ StAA Rep. 4 C III b 5 (b), Submission of Neue Fehn, December 5, 1722.

⁵⁴ StAA Rep. 4 C III b 6 (1), Submissions of Berum District, November 30–December 12, 1722; see also StAA Rep. 4 C III b 14, "Erklärung des Ampts Pewsum zur Nachlebung der kaysl. Decreten," presented December 4, 1722.

⁵⁵ "So lange ich einen warmen bluths-tropffen im leibe habe, so will ich es auff den fuß nicht unterschreiben"; StAA Rep. 4 C III b 10 (h), Report of *Amtmann* Christian Eberhard von Specht, December 7, 1722.

⁵⁶ "Aufm platten Lande hat man dermaßen unter den einfaltigen Leuthen grassieret, daß wohl keiner wohlbestellten Republ. dergleichen Proceduren erhört seyn, welche von den Hochf. Beamten wieder ihren Willen, wie man von selbigen genugsam mercken können, vorgenommen worden"; StAA Rep. 4 C III b 1, "Extractus aus dem von den Ostfr. Landt-Ständen in Kays. Reichshoffrath ub praes. 11 Febr. 1723 übergebenen Exhibito in Pto. der geschehenen Partitions-Erklärungen. Wegen Stickhauser-Amt."

signatures “from house to house” among “poor people (*schlechten Leuthen*), tenant farmers, day laborers, and beggars”; in Aurich district, signatories were alleged to be dependents of the prince; more shocking still, the signatories from Greetsiel district included a woman. The “preeminent [male] residents” of Greetsiel district, by contrast, had refused to sign.⁵⁷ The moral urgency of these charges derived from the ascriptive functions of signatures affixed in a communalist mode: lacking independent means of production, tenants, women, the poor, and Jews had no proper role in external representations of communal opinion. The clearest indication of this link was the allegation that district officers had collected signatures door-to-door: by summoning a threat to communal transparency, the Estates’ polemicists awakened the suspicion that any submission to the imperial rulings necessarily subverted the communal will.

This kind of rhetoric generated tactical space within which the Estates could disenfranchise whole villages that had accepted the imperial ruling of 1721, even when these positions had been achieved through regular channels of communal decision making.⁵⁸ Among the Estates’ first countermeasures was an effort to persuade delegates to the Third Chamber to revoke their declarations.⁵⁹ Soon the Estates turned on whole communes and districts that had accepted the imperial decree. In the winter of 1723–24 the electors of Berum district complained that their delegates had been deprived of their “seat and voice” in the diet for refusing to revoke, despite a stipulation of territorial law that forbade the expulsion of any duly credentialed delegate, even one suspected of criminal acts.⁶⁰ In another instance, the *Interessenten* Jan Jacobs of Twixlum and Ulrich Jürgens of Westerhusen were told to revoke their decla-

⁵⁷ StAA Rep. 4 C III b 1, subheadings “Wegen Friedeburger-Amt,” “Wegen Ohrtmer-Amt,” “Wegen Auricher-Amt,” and “Wegen Greetsiehler-Amt.”

⁵⁸ Of course, it also created space for criticizing the Estates’ claim to represent the rural commons. To make this point, Brenneysen published mandates of electoral representation (*Vollmachten*) to the schismatic diet in Aurich; see “Extractus Land-Tags-Protocoll vom 23ten Nov. 1724, Die Untersuchung der Vollmachten betreffend,” in StAA Dep. I MSC 24, fols. 66r–79v, *Abdruck / eines [. . .] MEMORIALS* (26 February 1726), pp. 19–25; and StAA M20 623 *Derer[. . .]Subdelegierten Räte / PATENTES*, p. 19.

⁵⁹ “Extract aus dem Ständischen Landtags-Protocollo; wegen Verstossung derjenigen Deputirten von Landtags-Versammlungen / welche die Partitions-Erklärung auff die Kayserliche Decreta nicht revociren wollen,” December 22, 1723, in *Kurze Facti Species von denen zwischen Sr. Hoch-Fürstlichen Durchlauchtigkeit zu Ost-Frießland und Dero Landes-Ständen / und in specie Dero Erb-eigenthümlichen Stadt Emden / bey dem Hochpreißlichem Kayserlichem Reichs-Hoff-Rathe vorschwebenden Streitigkeiten . . .* (Aurich, 1726), Documenta, no. 2, pp. 2–3.

⁶⁰ StAA Rep. 38, 29, pp. 245–46, *Prothocollum rerum publicarum (1704–1727)*, entry for January 12, 1724; and p. 259, entry for January 28, 1724. The settlement violated by these acts was the Hague Accord of 1662.

rations of acquiescence or lose all communal voting privileges. They did revoke, which in turn got them in trouble with Brenneysen's government. Under interrogation, Jacobs and Jürgens insisted that they had not knowingly recanted but rather had signed a blank sheet of paper to which the actual revocation text must have been added later.⁶¹ This was an obvious case of evasion. Nevertheless, their struggles with self-exculpation expose the stress that mobilization placed on regular modalities of representation. In the village of Suurhusen, this tension prompted the *Interessenten* to bar their delegate from signing any pledges without prior approval from the whole commune.⁶²

Beginning in late 1722, the Estates also got into the business of rural mobilization. In November of that year, notaries were sent into East Frisia's villages to mobilize villagers against *Interessenten* who had aligned themselves with the prince.⁶³ Then in January and February 1726, the Estates' agents organized "conventicles" in churches and "resistance-minded" alehouses throughout the districts of Leer, Emden, and Greetsiel for the purpose of binding villagers in oaths of mutual aid, resistance to the prince's excise tax collectors, and the payment of war taxes to the Estates.⁶⁴ In Greetsiel district, *Amtmann* Specht was at pains to emphasize the coercive nature of these ceremonies: the sole alternative to pledging, he insisted, was plunder and imprisonment. But he also related that signature gatherers moved without hindrance from village to village, and we have no reason to doubt that many villagers affixed their marks enthusiastically.⁶⁵

In most of Greetsiel and Emden districts, where the allegiance of rural people was contested most hotly, competition between the prince and the diet erased the fiction of a unified public and plunged communes headlong into the "reality of conflicting social groups."⁶⁶ For the first time, we find the lower orders of village society declaring their acceptance of the imperial court's ruling in defiance of local housefathers. One such group consisted of day laborers in the village of Pilsun, who accepted the ruling in November 1722, only a few months after they had gone on strike over the Estates' failure to

⁶¹ StAA Rep. 4 C III b 1, Report of Amtmann Arnold Bluhm, October 26, 1724.

⁶² StAA Rep. 4 C III b 8 (f), pp. 5–6, "Bericht wegen allerhand Kleinigkeiten," August 15, 1724; *ibid.*, 9–10, Report by Drost Fridag von Gödens, August 22, 1724.

⁶³ StAA Rep. 4 C III b 10 (h), pp. 21–24, Report of Schüttemeister J.J. Wehling of Pilsun, November 14, 1722; *ibid.*, "Protocollum Examinis Testis in Sachen ex officio contra Heinrich Tjaden," Greetsiel, December 4, 1722.

⁶⁴ StAA Rep. 4 C III b 24, "Extract aus denen Acten von der Stendischen Unruhe u. Empörung in Ao 1726." This text refers to "wiedergesinneten Bierhäuser."

⁶⁵ StAA Rep. 4 C III b 34, "Des Amtmanns zu Greetsyhl . . . Bericht vom 13. Febr. 1726 die Greetmer Amt von denen Renitenten ausgeübte Insolences betreffend."

⁶⁶ Harold Mah, "Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians," *Journal of Modern History* 72 (2000): 153–82.

pay wages for dike repairs.⁶⁷ It may be too much to argue that this competition prompted villagers to reimagine signatures as the expressions of an individually bounded point of view. Ude Peters of Jemgum, for example, articulated a communalist conceptualization of signatures in defense of his failure to sign a declaration of acquiescence. Peters had not realized, he claimed, that signatures were demanded “of people like me who are too common, disqualified from the affairs of the commonwealth, [and] of little means.”⁶⁸ Was Peters’ ignorance real or feigned? We cannot know for certain. To judge by the social diversity of signatories on all the lists, for and against the prince, non-enfranchised people understood very well that the collapse of communal restraints on political discourse had opened new avenues for self-assertive engagement.

Throughout East Frisia, we find housefathers struggling to cope with the disruptive effects of these intrusions, sometimes holding the commune together, sometimes not. In several instances, housefathers managed to hide their individuality behind anonymous assertions of defensive communal solidarity.⁶⁹ Emblematic of their dilemma was Wirdum’s attempt to steer a middle course, resolving “that, because we are neutral, we wish to adhere both to his illustrious Highness the Prince and to the Lord Administrators [of the Estates] in Em-den.”⁷⁰

III. COERCION AND EMPOWERMENT IN SIGNING

So the dismantling of communalist signatures required plenty of coercion, just as the grand narrative of state-driven individuation would lead one to expect. Must we therefore conclude that these signatures could not have been given freely or that signature gathering cannot have had an empowering effect? It is easy to find evidence that coercion was applied by both sides. The day laborer Edde Hinrichs, for example, frankly admitted the influence of official coercion on his decision to sign a declaration of submission to the imperial court ruling

⁶⁷ StAA Rep. 4 C III b 10 (h), pp. 25–26, Submission of “Arbeitsleute” in Pilsum, November 14, 1722. On the dike-worker rebellions of June 1722, see Rolf Uphoff, *Die Deicher* (Oldenbourg: Isensee, 1995), pp. 242–44.

⁶⁸ StAA Rep. 4 B IV d 109, fols. 16r–17v, Supplication of Ude Peters, Jemgum, July 28, 1727.

⁶⁹ See, e.g., StAA Rep. 4 C III b 34, “Der Eingeseßenen zu Uttum in Greetmer Ambt Erklärung daß sie es auff den letzten Blutropffen mit ihrem Landesherrn halten wollen,” February 14, 1726; StAA Rep. 4 C III b 32, “Schreiben der Eingeseßenen zu Ditzum darinn sie sich beschweren über die Drohungen derer von Jemgum und Ober-Reiderland wegen unrechtmäßiger Geld-Forderungen etc.,” presented March 5, 1726. See also StAA Rep. 4 C III b 32, Act of Union in Niederreiderland, February 27, 1726.

⁷⁰ StAA Rep. 4 C III b 30, Communal Resolution of Wirdum, April 10, 1726.

of 1721. The powerful *Interessent* Habbo Richts of Pilsum had urged Hinrichs to “strike the devils dead, chuck them out, and let them lie,” but the day laborer responded that “we know better than you what’s best, otherwise we’ll have constables at our door.”⁷¹ But for every Edde Hinrichs there was one such as Peter Lammers, who threatened the residents of Midlum with beatings if they did not sign the Estates’ “Memorial.”⁷² Indeed, the chancellor’s mailbox bulged with villagers’ pleas for protection against the threat of plunder if they failed to sign declarations of support for the Estates’ side in the conflict.⁷³ When emissaries from the Estates arrived in Grimersum demanding cash payments, for example, the village mayor objected, saying, “Shall then the freedom of East Frisians consist in this, that against all justice we must dance to the tune of an equal . . . or else suffer forcible exactions or even be hauled away in chains?”⁷⁴ To conclude from statements such as these that signatures cannot describe conscious and assertive engagement in political communication is to confuse a discursive trope with the circumstances of undersigning. There is a reason why so much evidence of coercion survives: both sides used the charge of coercion to defame the signatures gathered by the other side and busily collected documentation in support of their respective claims. To consider one side’s signatures free and the other’s forced, therefore, is to take sides in a dichotomizing, eighteenth-century polemic.⁷⁵ More important, to distinguish sharply between free and coerced forms of expression is to obscure the fundamental ambiguity of any speech act under circumstances that were transforming conventional gestures of loyalty into signs of factional sympathy or antipathy. Coercion was inescapable. By the same token, however, political

⁷¹ “haut de Düvels doet, schmijt se daarhen, un laet se liggen”; “wir müßen beßer wiß, alß Ihr, sonst haben wir die Gerichtsdiener umb der Thür”; StAA Rep. 4 C III b 10 (h), pp. 57–62, “Des Rentmeisters zu Greetsyhl unterthäniger Bericht nebst angeschlossenem Extracto vom 24ten 9ten 1724 das ermasenen Unterrichten und Sprechen des Teich- und Syhlrichter sodan Ordinair-Deputirter landschafflichen Collegio Habbo Richts in Pilsum betr.”

⁷² An account of Lammers’s bullying talk is reproduced at the head of this article.

⁷³ See, e.g., StAA Rep. 4 C III b 32, Petition of Jacob Claesen, a domain tenant in Ditzumer-Hammrich, October 9, 1726; and StAA Rep. 4 C III b 34, “Des Amtmanns zu Greetsyhl . . . Bericht vom 13. Febr. 1726.”

⁷⁴ “Ob dann die Freiheit der Ostfriesen bestehen solte, daß man wieder alle Billigkeit immer nach seines Gleichen pfeiffen solte, dantzen, oder sonsten gewertigen müßen, daß man gewaltsamerweise deßwegen executiret oder auch woll gar selbsten gefänglich hinweg geschleppt werden würde?”; StAA Rep. 4 C III b 32, “Des Drostens zu Greetsyhl und Embden . . . Bericht vom 11 April 1726.” According to this report, one of the emissaries, Leo van Wingene, attacked the village mayor (Peter Jansen) with a loaded pistol but was restrained from killing him.

⁷⁵ For example, Wiarda (n. 29 above), 7:220–24.

communication was becoming more open and inclusive. Signature gathering drew people into forms of political communication from which they had previously been shut out. Signature gathering, then, both atomized the signer and drew non-enfranchised groups into a gray zone of public communication where force and freedom intermingled, where the relationship between signer, autograph, and political assertion was loosed from its rule-bound, communal moorings.

There are also solid, empirical reasons to conclude that, despite the coercion around them, East Frisians of all social categories conceived of their signatures as acts of engagement with profound consequences for the implementation of imperial law. The *Partitionsanzeigen* are particularly telling in this regard. To be sure, a large number of them adhered strictly to the chancellor's demand for voluntary and unconditional declarations of compliance.⁷⁶ But other villagers were less compliant linguistically. Some took up the summons as an opportunity to renegotiate the terms of their relationship to prince and diet.⁷⁷ Still others presented texts that were packed with reservations that destabilized Brenneysen's aims. Declarations in this category made acquiescence conditional on *Accordmäßigkeit*—that is, on the consistency of the RHR ruling with territorial law. In the Estates' interpretation, of course, this is exactly what the RHR ruling was not.⁷⁸ The peasants of Grimersum and Eilsum achieved this simply by inserting the word *accordmäßig* or a similar phrase into a text that otherwise expressed unconditional compliance (fig. 3).⁷⁹ More common were formal reservation clauses that explicitly linked the force of signatures to submission only “in so far as the East Frisian territorial settlements and accords”

⁷⁶ For the most part, these emanated from the districts of Aurich, Berum, Stickhausen, and Friedeburg, where the city of Emden's influence was weakest, although the fishing town of Greetsiel and several villages nearby signed in this manner as well. StAA Rep. 4 C III b 10 (h), pp. 31–32, Submission of Greetsiel, December 5, 1722; see also the submissions of Upleward (December 4) and three adjacent villages that signed on December 9, 1722—Manslagt, Hamswehrum, and Pilsum (ibid., pp. 39–43).

⁷⁷ StAA Rep. 4 C III b 10 (h), pp. 17–19, “Supplication der Eingeseßenen zu Pilsumb in Greetmer Amt,” October 24, 1722.

⁷⁸ Heinrich Schmidt, *Politische Geschichte Ostfrieslands* (Leer, 1975), pp. 313–14.

⁷⁹ “[EHD] geruhen . . . zu vernehmen, daß denen . . . allerhöchte Ks. Decretis und Verordnungen, accord-mäßig alleruntertänigst und freywillig zu unterwerfen wir bereit sind”; StAA Rep. 4 C III b 10 (h), pp. 47–48, January 10, 1723. Similarly, the village of Canhusen submitted with the defiant request that they be strengthened in the enjoyment of their ancient rights and privileges; StAA Rep. 4 C III b 8 (f), p. 50, November 27, 1724.

were not compromised in the process.⁸⁰ One text consisted tersely of this reservation clause and little else.⁸¹

As these formulations suggest, conditional declarations indicated that their signatories identified strongly with the Estates and regarded East Frisia's territorial settlements as the guarantee of order against the arbitrary power of monarchs. But unless one is prepared to assume that the signatures affixed to unconditional submissions describe only duress, we have to regard them all as at least minimally expressive. As if to anticipate the charge that they had been forced to accept the imperial decree of 1721, several declarations distinguished between compliance and subservience, declaring the one while rejecting the other. The *Interessenten* of Hage parish, for example, denied that there was any conflict between the East Frisian territorial settlements and the RHR ruling of 1721.⁸² The text to which they affixed their signatures may very well have been circulated by the *Amtmann* of Berum district, Hermann Wichmann Grems.⁸³ Still, the villagers affirmed its contents through normal channels of communal deliberation, and one cannot discount it as an articulation of local interests and subjectivities unless one is willing to do the same with texts that were circulated on the Estates behalf and deliberated in the same manner. Rural Frisians may not have understood the constitutional struggle in all its complexity.⁸⁴ But they were fully engaged with it, on both sides, and conceived of themselves as active, necessary participants in its processes.

Why? We know that in many villages, for instance, *Interessenten* actively involved themselves in mobilizations on the Estates' behalf. Habbo Richts aided notaries sent from Emden to collect signatures in Pilsum; in Greetsiel, a defrocked ex-pastor named Paul Wilkens and church elder Claes Weyers Dirks assembled the townsfolk and insisted that "everyone must adhere to the old Estates [in Emden]" and "confess with their signatures" their readiness to

⁸⁰ See the submission of Freepsum, October 22, 1724, StAA Rep. 4 C III b 8 (f), p. 31; on this and the following day, the same text *mutatis mutandis*, was presented by Canum, Cirkwehrum, Wybelsum, and Woltzetzen, all communes in the Emden district. Similarly Hamswehrum submitted in the "confidence" that in his imperial majesty would continue "to protect and assist the Estates and ourselves in [the enjoyment of] our ancient customs, *accord-mäßig* privileges and freedoms"; StAA Rep. 4 C III b 10 (h), pp. 109–11 [1725].

⁸¹ "[It] was undersigned in the following manner, that whatever in the imperial decrees is not against the accords and treaties, we submit to" [War unterschrieben auf folgende weise wat nit weder accorden en vertragen iß, underwerpe up ney de Kays. Decreten]; StAA Rep. 4 C III b 10 (h), p. 39, December 9, 1722.

⁸² StAA Rep. 4 C III b 6 (l), p. 18, Vollmacht of Hage Vogtei, November 30, 1722.

⁸³ This is suggested by the fact that the same assertion was included in the declarations of Arle, Hagermarsch, Ostermarsch, Halbmond, and Nesse parishes in Berum district; see StAA Rep. 4 C III b 6 (l), pp. 25–29, 33–36, 48–51, and 55–60.

⁸⁴ Kappelhoff, *Absolutistisches Regiment* (n. 2 above), p. 185.

pay its excise tax collectors.⁸⁵ By comparing signature lists with available data on the status and wealth of individual East Frisians, we get at least a general idea of who signed what sort of declaration. We are fortunate to possess a kind of census, compiled in 1719 and intended as the basis for an extraordinary head tax (*Kopfschatzung*) to finance dike repairs.⁸⁶ Pastors in each parish were instructed to place every survivor in one of twenty-five social and legal categories, and although the pastors simplified this scheme greatly, the more careful compilers managed to record the occupation of a household head, the number of household inhabitants, and, in the case of farmers, whether the household head was an independent proprietor or rented his/her lands and how many acres were under cultivation.⁸⁷ By cross-linking these data with signature lists, it is possible to reconstruct the social profile of those who aligned themselves publicly with one side or another.

In villages located within the western half of Greetsiel district, these linkages yield a strong correlation between rank and text: the *Interessenten* were far more likely to sign declarations that were sympathetic to the Estates—including the declaration compiled in November 1725 and published in December. The distributions in table 1 describe these correlations. Column 1 of table 1 shows the social composition of residents who signed declarations of submission to the imperial decree of 1721; column 2 describes people who signed statements of “conditional” acquiescence circulated in 1725 by the Estates in its effort to negate the earlier, unconditional declarations. The third column includes the names of *Westervogtei* residents who subscribed the Third Estates’ accession in November 1725 to the party of Emden and the nobility—the clearest statement of opposition to the prince. The fourth and final column describes persons who signed a separate declaration, circulated only in Greetsiel district in January 1726 and published in February, which protested against Brenneysen’s attempts to divide the *Interessenten* politically. Signatories are grouped into four categories, all based on linkages with the head tax register of 1719: the freeholding *Interessenten*, tenant farmers (*Heuerleute*), the so-called *Warfleute*—a group who included cottagers and village artisans—and day laborers (*Tagelöhner/Arbeiter*).

Two things about these percentages are especially noteworthy. First, they

⁸⁵ StAA Rep. 4 C III b 34, “Des Rentmeisters zu Greetsyl. Bericht die zu Greetsiel unternommene Pegelung in Gegenwarth allerhand losen Gesindels auß Embden, sodann wiederrechtliche Convocation und umb Verschreibung gegen das hiesige *Caesarea auctoritate* angestellte Landschafft. Collegium betr.,” February 12, 1726.

⁸⁶ See Manfred Jakubowski-Thiessen’s introductory remarks in Erhard Schulte, ed., *Kopf-Schatzung 1719* (Aurich, 1999).

⁸⁷ StAA Rep. 4 C I g 59, “Mandat an die Prediger Auricher Ampts wegen Publication der Kopfschatzung auch Verfertigung der Reigester,” June 30, 1719.

TABLE 1
SIGNATORIES BY SOCIAL CATEGORY (Amt Greetsiel, Westervogtei)

Social Category	Acceded Unconditionally (1722–24)		Acceded Conditionally (1725)		Signed the Declaration of November 1725		Signed the Declaration of February 1726	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<i>Interessenten</i>	9	3.49	14	63.64	22	16.79	16	13.11
<i>Heuerleute</i>	15	5.81	2	9.09	16	12.21	10	8.20
<i>Warfleute</i>	109	42.25	5	22.73	46	35.11	47	38.52
<i>Tagelöhner/Arbeiter</i>	70	27.13	0	0.00	24	18.32	20	16.39
Other/unknown	55	21.32	1	4.55	23	17.56	29	23.77
Total	258		22		131		122	

SOURCES.—Social Category, StAA Rep. C I g 63, Kopfschätzungsregister des Amtes Greetsiel, 1719. Submissions (1724): StAA Rep. 4 C III b 10 (h), pp. 25–26, 35–36, 39, 40–41, 42, 43, 47–48, 109–111; Submissions in the manner of Emden (1725): StAA Rep. 4 C III b 10 (h), pp. 65–69; Accession of 1725: StAA Dep. I MSC 23, fols. 468r–470v, *Einiger Eingesessenen aus Emden- Leerer- und Greetmer Amt Schreiben . . .* (Emden, December 1725); Petition of February 1726: StAA Dep. I MSC 24, fols. 66r–79v, *Abdruck / eines / der hohen Subdelegierten Comission . . . eingereichten unterdienstlichen MEMORIALS* (February 26, 1726).

show that in 1725 the Estates' agents began to solicit the signatures of non-*Interessenten*, thereby including “people / who have little or no property” in processes of political communication.⁸⁸ Second and more important, the social distribution of signatures indicates that *Interessenten* were much more likely than other groups to sign a statement that was openly defiant toward the prince. Thus, in 1722, only nine *Interessenten* in the western half of the district submitted unconditionally—a tiny fraction of all signatories, and well under their share of the adult male population.⁸⁹ Those who submitted conditionally, by contrast, were overwhelmingly of the rural elite. At the opposite end of the social scale, day laborers were far likelier to accept the imperial decree without conditions attached.⁹⁰ Of course, making historical information legible in this way can obscure subtlety: submitting unconditionally one year did not, for

⁸⁸ StAA Dep. I MSC 23, fols 468r–470v, *Einiger Eingesessenen aus Emden- Leerer- und Greetmer Amt Schreiben*, sec. 4.

⁸⁹ According to the head-tax register of 1719, about 10 percent (forty-six of 465) of household heads were *Interessenten*.

⁹⁰ Day laborers made up about a third of all households in 1719 and were underrepresented on all the lists, but the disparity was especially great on lists that expressed alignment with the Estates' cause. In between were *Heuerleute*—tenant farmers—and *Warfleute*—the rough equivalent of cottagers, including small farmers, rural artisans, and weavers. The *Heuerleute* were overrepresented only among signatories to the declaration published in December 1725; the *Warfleute* and artisans were underrepresented on all the lists.

example, exclude taking the Estates' part later on. Some people, it seems, would sign anything: the autograph of Johann Gayken, the village constable (*Schüttemeister*) of Pilsum, shows up on all four lists. But if we examine the social pattern of those who revoked unconditional submissions, the same gradient reappears: of the nine *Interessenten* who submitted in 1722, all but two withdrew subsequently—Nomde Haykes of Manslagt and Menno Jargs Tjaden of Pilsum. By the same token, 47 of the 70 day laborers whose names appear on the 1722 register never revoked their submissions. These linkages suggest that in coastal villages the Estates' cause resonated most powerfully with the *Interessenten* and was weakest among artisans and day laborers.⁹¹ A local explanation is readily at hand: village studies indicate a sharpening of social divisions after the Christmas Flood, which so devastated poorer peasants that a large number were compelled to sell their lands and goods to neighbors who were better off. In the villages of Manslagt and Campen, for example, a small number of *Interessenten* were able to buy up the devastated plots and cottages of poorer neighbors.⁹²

It would be rash to generalize from these examples that *Interessenten* as a group supported the Estates' cause because it offered them a set of ideological defenses against new threats across the social divide of political entitlement. In some parts of East Frisia, as we have already seen, *Interessenten* aligned with the prince against the Estates. Elsewhere, most of the enfranchising farmsteads were owned by residents of the city, so that the sociolegal distinction between absentee landowners and *Interessenten* was effectively nil.⁹³ None of this is to deny the existence of a "corporative consciousness" (*ständisches Bewußtsein*) among the *Interessenten*—on the contrary, what evidence we have suggests its vigor.⁹⁴ The point, rather, is that one must imagine the signatures of all rural East Frisians as tactical responses to unfamiliar and potentially dangerous situations, the products of local calculations of risk, and contingent on highly variable local constellations of interest. Their formal and authorial

⁹¹ Kappelhoff, *Absolutistisches Regiment*, pp. 267–68.

⁹² Ute Jachens, "Wandel der Agrar- und Sozialstruktur in der Krummhörn vom Beginn des 17. Bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Als Friesen Preussen waren: Ostfriesland im 18. Jahrhundert—Aufsatzband*, ed. Theo Meyer and Willem Koppers (Aurich, 1997), pp. 80–89; see also Waldemar Reinhardt, "Die Orts- und Flurformen Ostfrieslands in ihrer Siedlungsgeschichtlichen Entwicklung," in *Ostfriesland im Schutze des Deiches: Beiträge zur Kultur- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte des Ostfriesischen Küstenlandes* (Leer: Rantenberg, 1968), 1:107–378.

⁹³ Engelbrecht (n. 27 above), pp. 207–15.

⁹⁴ Several household inventories of East Frisian housefathers, for example, include copies of the county's territorial settlements, such as the Accord of Osterhusen; see Harm Wiemann, ed., "Inventar des Bauern J. Groens zu Bunde," *Mitteilungen der Arbeitsgruppen der Ostfriesischen Landschaft* 9, no. 2 (1978): 57–62; 9, no. 3 (1978): 80–90.

diversity, not their content per se, records the tidal strain of multipolar conflict on communal solidarity and the signatures that normally expressed its will.

IV. VILLAGE SOCIETY, POLITICAL CULTURE, AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

This article began with an analysis of the historical underpinnings of what I have called communalist signatures, continued with a description of the process by which this paradigm was dismantled, and has concluded with an assessment of force and freedom in the act of signing. The argument has been that a combination of external forces and tensions within village society, not simply a one-sided state intrusion on the face-to-face exchanges of village life, eroded communal barriers around the person and in the process transformed the meanings of signatures as tokens of political communication. By 1726, people of all social backgrounds were engaging in public discourse, whether or not they were “qualified” to do so in communalist terms, and often at considerable personal risk.

These findings confirm the verdict of recent studies that do not take communal solidarity for granted but seek instead to reconstruct both the dynamics of its formation and the impact of social differentiation on rural political culture. Until the mid-1990s, a “seamless conception” of village community prevailed in the study of rural politics and social life. This idea resulted from apposite concerns with judicial tribunals and territorial estates as the institutional venues in which communes engaged most actively with the early modern state.⁹⁵ But it also tended to portray communalism and social stratification as antagonistic forces and assumed that, in most instances, the affective bonds of communal sociability neutralized the disrupting effects of inequality. In their studies of Hessen and Upper Swabia, Robert von Friedeburg and Martin Zürn, respectively, have rejected this opposition and have instead stressed the fundamental dependence of communal power on housefather oligarchy and its fragility in relation to internal social tensions and external pressures.⁹⁶ In East Frisia, similarly, social differentiation and stratification lay at the very foundation of communal institutions and the signatures that represented them to the wider world. And as the analysis of signatures has shown,

⁹⁵ The characterization is from Govind Sreenivasan, “The Social Origins of the Peasants’ War of 1525 in Upper Swabia,” *Past and Present* 171 (2001): 30–65. See Peter Blickle, *Landschaften im Alten Reich* (n. 22 above); and Winfried Schulze, *Bäuerlicher Widerstand und feudale Herrschaft in der frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt, 1980).

⁹⁶ Von Friedeburg, *Ländliche Gesellschaft* (n. 15 above); Zürn, ‘*Ir aigen libertet*’ (n. 15 above).

the protective closure of East Frisian villages depended vitally on the ability of housefather elites to fend off challenges from within and without. Communal barriers around the individual, then, were not the natural by-product of village sociability but something that had to be cultivated and maintained, by force if need be.⁹⁷ For those who cling to a “seamless conception” of village community, macronarratives of socioeconomic development provide one escape from the complexities this research has brought to light. Most of the newer studies focus on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when, it may be argued, market integration and social differentiation are supposed to have demolished the relative homogeneity on which communalism had earlier been founded. But this hypothesis too has come under criticism: if David W. Sabean and Govind Sreenivasan are right, the politics of oligarchy were no symptom of communalism unraveled but instead were integral to the causes and agendas of collective action and peasant rebellion from the mid-fifteenth century on.⁹⁸

Moreover, the newer research has exposed the fragility of housefather oligarchy, especially when the resources and loyalties of rural people became objects of competition among several lords. In East Frisia as in many other territories, that competition unfolded between territorial Estates and a monarch and manifested itself locally in the signature gathering of their respective agents. The salient point is that in the fractured political landscape of early modern Germany, communal institutions were frequently exposed to the conflicting demands of competing state-like entities. Effective rule so often depended on rural clientage networks that such competition could easily exacerbate latent social tensions within the village. Martin Zürn’s magnificent study of rural politics near the headwaters of the Danube reveals how divisive such competition could become. In the early seventeenth century, to cite one of his many examples, competitive alliance making between Habsburg commissars and the *Truchsessen* of Waldburg-Truchberg precipitated the collapse of legitimate authority and intensified factional tensions between rival clientage networks so greatly that they erupted with accusations of witchcraft.⁹⁹ In the

⁹⁷ See Günter Mahlerwein, *Die Herren im Dorf: Bäuerliche Oberschicht und ländliche Elitenbildung in Rheinhessen 1700–1850* (Mainz, 2001).

⁹⁸ Sreenivasan, “Social Origins of the Peasants’ War” and Govind Sreenivasan, *The Peasants of Ottobeuren 1487–1723: A Rural Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2003), esp. chap. 2. This argument was first articulated by David W. Sabean in *Landbesitz und Gesellschaft am Vorabend des Bauernkrieges* (Stuttgart, 1972); and John C. Stalnaker, “Auf dem Weg zu einer sozialgeschichtlichen Interpretation des Deutschen Bauernkrieges 1525–6,” in *Der Deutsche Bauernkrieg*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Göttingen, 1975), pp. 38–60.

⁹⁹ Zürn, *‘Ir eigen libertet’*, esp. pp. 169–227; and Martin Zürn, “‘Von solch einer bösen Rasse’: Bäuerlicher Widerstand und dörfliche Kriminalität an der oberen Donau,” in Häberlein, ed. (n. 10 above), pp. 249–75.

absence of an overarching territorial authority to contain and mediate such rivalries, communes became the stage on which conflicts among lords played out. As villages were exposed to pressures from without, we should not be surprised to find marginalized groups asserting themselves from within, as non-enfranchised East Frisians did by signing declarations. In early modern Hessen, as Robert von Friedeburg has shown, conflicts within villages grew more intense as divisions of wealth and entitlement deepened. Marginalized groups asserted their interests against housefathers who monopolized communal authority by appropriating those social norms and values that they believed would serve them best in court. Not surprisingly, these typically included appeals to communalist values such as the “Common Good.”¹⁰⁰ Taken together, these studies warn against conceptualizing the transformations of rural political culture within a binary opposition between “seamless” village communes and the early modern state.

They should also warn against regarding villages and conflict as obstacles to the formation of the public sphere. The dominant narrative situates its development squarely in the cities where salons and literary societies flourished and contrasts its fundamentally open and egalitarian sociability with the hierarchical and segmented structure of political communication that prevailed beyond city gates.¹⁰¹ In the absence of these supports, no true sphere of public discourse, let alone the notion of a disembodied “public opinion” that passed judgment on princes and diets, could possibly take shape. As long as princes and diets were thought to embody society as a whole, rural people could only play the role of spectators. The modern public sphere, in short, was a bourgeois phenomenon.

Such a characterization could hardly be more at odds with the experience of East Frisia. The document that introduced this essay, after all, was published for wide circulation. That it and broadsheets like it were in fact distributed and read can be deduced from the helpless efforts of district officials to halt their dissemination and from rural protests against such attempts to restrict the flow of polemical texts that were sympathetic to the Estates.¹⁰² These included an

¹⁰⁰ See von Friedeburg, *Ländlich Gesellschaft*; and Robert von Friedeburg, “‘Reiche,’ ‘Geringe Leute,’ und ‘Beambte’: Landesherrschaft, Dörfliche ‘Factionen’ und gemeindliche Partizipation, 1648–1806,” *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 23 (1996): 219–65.

¹⁰¹ See Ernst Manheim, *Die Träger der öffentlichen Meinung: Studien zur Soziologie der Öffentlichkeit* (Brünn, 1933); and, most important, Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, 1991).

¹⁰² “Fürstlich-Ostfriesisches Patent vom 24. Decembr. 1725,” reprinted in StAA M20 623 *Derer [. . .] Subdelegierten Räte / PATENTES*, pp. 11–14. On the publication of this decree, see StAA Rep. 28, 2834, Amtsgerichtsprotokoll Greetsiel, pp. 92–93

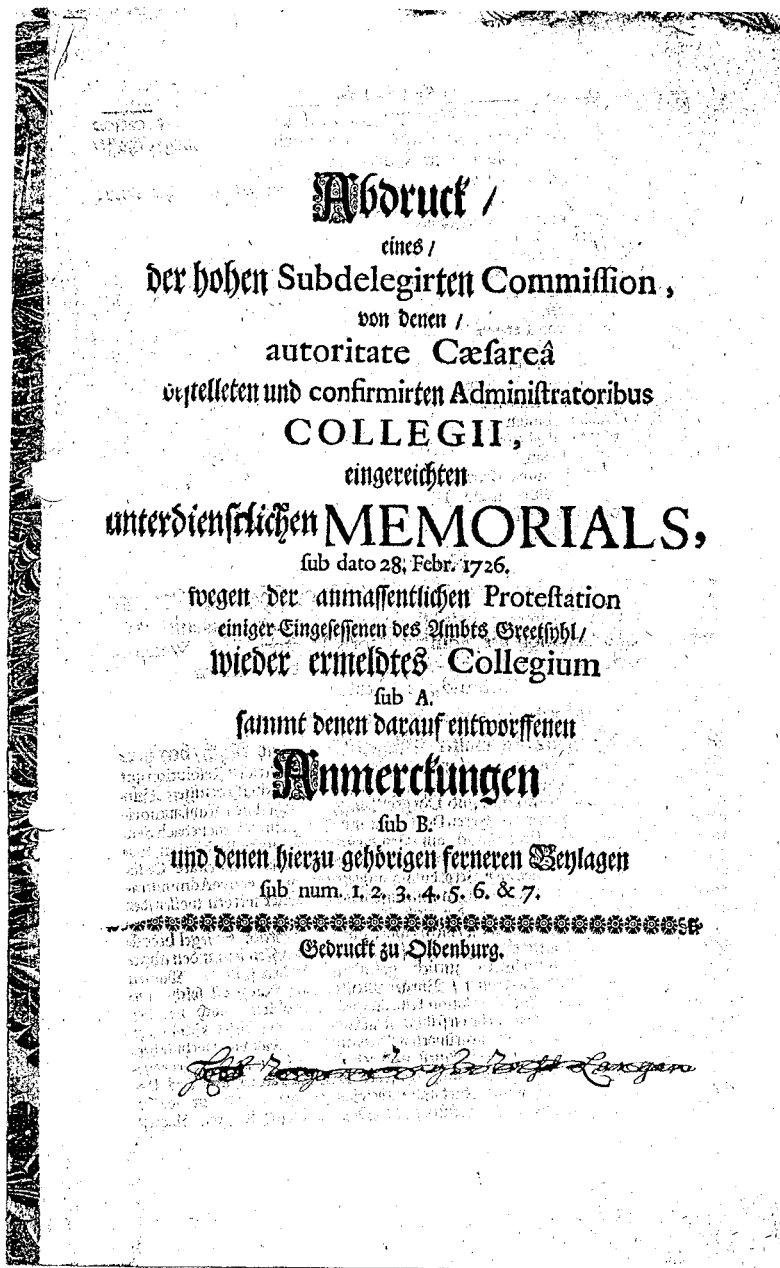


FIG. 4.—Signatures and “Public Opinion.” This “Memorial,” published by the princely government, reproduced verbatim the printed version of a “Protestation,” signed by 139 inhabitants of Greetsiel district, and annotated it with scathing endnotes and seven *pièces justificatives*. StAA Dep. I MSC 24, fols. 66r–79v.

easy-to-hide, pocket-sized digest of territorial law that argued in favor of the Estates' exclusive right to administer public finances.¹⁰³ The princely government was no less active in this respect: it took to publishing annotations of the Estates' broadsheets, replete with scathing commentary, sarcastic footnotes, and reproductions of official documents that supported the prince's position (fig. 4). In the midst of the struggle, it even published a collection of 122 documents, including secret memoranda, petitions, and captured correspondence, all intended to expose the illegality and coerciveness of the Estates' methods.¹⁰⁴ By their actions, if not always by their words, both prince and diet recognized the need to win the sympathies of rural people by persuading them with argumentation and reason. And in this East Frisia was no more unusual than it was in other respects. Andreas Würigler has shown how the circulation of polemical texts in social conflict provided material for discussion in taverns and village assemblies throughout central and southwestern Germany. These exchanges, he argues, had the effect of amplifying long-standing demands for the publication of laws and decrees, the right to assembly, participation in electoral processes, and the like.¹⁰⁵

Though dependent on others for supplies of text, villagers were anything but passive participants in the formation of opinion. Perhaps it is too much to say that conflicts such as East Frisia's troubles were capable of creating the idea of public opinion as "the authoritative judgment of collective conscience." But as the transformation of signatures makes clear, the public sphere emerged not solely from the bourgeois milieu, as Habermas maintained, but arose through social conflict within rural society as well.

(January 2, 1726). A formal protest against these decrees is contained in StAA Dep. I MSC 24, fols. 66r–79v, *Abdruck / eines [. . .] MEMORIALS* (February 26, 1726), sec. 2, p. 4.

¹⁰³ StAA M20 225, *Kurtzer / jedoch Gründlicher Bericht / von der Ostfriesischen Ständen / Freyheit / Macht / Recht und Gerechtigkeit / mit ausschließung des Landes-Herren / Steuern / Schatzungen / oder andern / Anlagen einzuwilligen[. . .]* (Emden, 1723). The booklet measured an easily concealable 12.3 cm × 7.4 cm.

¹⁰⁴ Between July 1724 and October 1726, for example, it had published no fewer than twenty-eight announcements, pamphlets, and decrees on the authority of the imperial commission of investigation. See "Specification dererjenigen Stücke / welche von der anwesenden Kayserlichen subdelegierten Commission seitherio abgedrucket / und im Lande publiciret sind," in StAA M 20 627, *Kurtze Species Facti von denen zwischen Sr. Hoch-Fürstlichen Durchlauchtigkeit zu Ost-Frießland und Dero Landes-Ständen / und in specie Dero Erb-eigenthümlichen Stadt Emden / bey dem Hochpreißlichen Kayserlichem Reichs-Hoff-Rathe vorschwebenden Streitigkeiten* (Aurich, 1726).

¹⁰⁵ Andreas Würigler, *Unruhen und Öffentlichkeit: Städtische und ländliche Protestbewegungen im 18. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Bibliotheca Academica, 1995), pp. 116–26, 196–202. See also Gestrich, *Absolutismus und Öffentlichkeit* (n. 13 above), pp. 63–74.