

Heinrich Alexander Baron von Arnim

Prussian diplomat, Statesman, Politician
born 13th February 1798 in Berlin,
died 5th January 1861 in Düsseldorf

His first name was Heinrich but in private and especially in his later marriage, as letters and poems reveal, he referred to himself as Alexis. Nowadays both names Heinrich and Alexander are in general use.

Heinrich Alexander's ancestral home was Suckow in the Uckermark. He was born as the eleventh and youngest child of the second "Fideikommißherr" of Suckow, Georg Leopold Vivigenz von Arnim (1747 - 1828) and his spouse Charlotte, born Countess zu Solms-Sonnenwalde (1759 - 1811). He received the essential basis of his education at the "Pädagogium of the Franckeschen Stiftungen" in Halle. There, his "turning to Christianity influenced by Pietism" ¹ was founded. His granddaughter Marie von Buch born Baroness von dem Bussche writes, "Even in his old age he revisited Halle in grateful memory of those school years, because what he heard there - for the first time - was 'true Christianity according to the Bible', which was unheard of in his own family and not mainstream thinking during those days when rationalism was flourishing. However Heinrich Alexander took in the old-new teachings and absorbed them "like someone quenching his thirst from a clear fountain" and it remained true for him throughout his life what those school years had given him as a present. Although Heinrich Alexander had many enemies in later years, nobody dared to dispute that he was what he seemed and wanted to be looked upon - as an upright Christian" ²



Heinrich Alexander Baron von Arnim,
painted by Peter Schick

Important stages of his life

- 1811 He attends school at the "Pädagogium der Franckeschen Stiftungen" in Halle, later at Berlin most probably at the Joachimsthalsche Gymnasium (= GB: grammar school, USA: high school).
- 1813 Heinrich Alexander fights in the Battle of Leipzig. In a letter to his daughter Else from October 10th 1855 he describes those days when had joined the freedom fighters as a very young volunteer "It was yesterday 42 years ago that I was in the Battle of Leipzig. There I was in much greater danger - and I am still alive!" ²
- 30.4.1815 He joins the 2nd Kurmärkische militia-cavalry-regiment.
- 16.6.1815 In the Battle near Ligny he is heavily wounded numerous times. The resulting "Ligny leg" caused him a lot of trouble all his life; he always needed a walking stick, which resulted in his being called the "lame Arnim".
- 1818 Dismissal from military services as "Seconde-Lieutenant" with 96 Thaler "Wartegeld" (= a sum of money paid to a soldier by the state) and the prospect of being provided for as a civil servant.
- 1818/19 He attends the university of Heidelberg to study jurisprudence and political science.

- 1818 First encounter with Elisabeth (Betty) Baroness Strick van Linschoten, whom he married 8 years later. They led a happy marriage lasting 20 years up to her early death.
- 1820 Beginning of his diplomatic career; appointments to Bern, Munich, Copenhagen.
- 1824 Secretary to the legation at the Prussian embassy in Naples.
- 1827 Birth of his son Bamin, who died only 5 months later.
- 1828 First encounter and beginning of his friendship with the Prussian crown prince Friedrich Wilhelm.
- 1829 Birth of his second son Detlef, who was only 4 years old when he died in 1833.
- 1830 Legate at the court of the grand duke of Hesse in Darmstadt - at the same time responsible for the courts at Nassau and Baden.
- 1834 Transferred to the Foreign Office (USA: State Department) in Berlin.
- 1834 Birth of his daughter Else.
- 1835 Appointed as speaker counsellor to a legation.
- 1840 Appointed as Prussian legate in Brussels.
- 1841 Elevated to the status as a baron.
- 1844 Appointed as privy councillor, Excellency.
- 1846 Appointed as Prussian legate in Paris.
- 6th October, 1846 Death of his spouse Betty in Paris.
- February 1848 Revolution in Paris.
- 7th March, 1848 Departure from Paris.
- 11th March, 1848 Return to Berlin.
- 21st March, 1848 Appointed as Prussian Foreign Secretary (USA: Secretary of State).
- 19th June, 1848 Dismissal from the post as minister at his own request and "position for disposal"; that was the end of his services to the state.
- 1848/49 Participates in the debates preparing Germany's first constitution in Frankfurt am Main.
- 1848 Elected as a representative of the Upper House of the Prussian National Assembly;
- 1851/52 Criminal proceedings against Heinrich Alexander von Arnim because of his criticism of the Prussian state government; sentenced to pay a fine of 200 Thaler.
- 5th January, 1861 Heinrich Alexander Baron von Arnim dies in Düsseldorf.



Heinrich Alexander von Arnim, 1827

Over the following paragraphs, we endeavour to portray the rather contradictory character of Heinrich Alexander with help of a number of quotations: A description of his younger self is as follows: “(...) Big, blue and bright eyes, a straight nose, a lively mouth, always ready to talk and laugh, never at a loss of an answer and in his chin a deep dimple, which was most enchanting.’ And behind his forehead there lived a thousand thoughts and ideas, a thousand plans, designs, theories, in addition, poetry in prose and in verse and special projects for numerous

inventions. 'Today Heinrich is again totally confused' his brothers said, when he was still young." ²

The Prussian diplomat Albrecht Count von Pourtales (1812 - 1861) is supposed to have said, "In order to completely understand Heinrich Alexander von Arnim one has to know that he consists of four parts: First, he is a brave man; second, a devout man; third, a sensible man - and fourth, he is a jester! Anyone who does not realize this fourth part of his does not know him at all!" ²

Count Voß (1729 - 1832), legate to Naples and Heinrich Alexander's new superior, writes to his wife about his first impressions of Heinrich Alexander after his arrival: "Arnim himself is more distinguished than I believed - although I knew that he is not an ordinary man." ¹



Elisabeth (Betty) von Arnim, born Baroness Strick van Linschoten, 1827

His biographer Albrecht von dem Bussche assesses him in the following way, „Arnim is a statesman of class. His tragedy has its roots in that he was ahead of his peers in many ways but did not find the time to develop a standing of historical significance through implementing his ideas." ¹ An important milestone in Heinrich Alexander's career was meeting the then Prussian heir apparent and later king, Friedrich Wilhelm IV (1795 - 1861). Von Arnim and his wife Betty looked after the Royal Highness during his visit to the Prussian legation in Naples. A friendship resulting from this stay lasted until 1848, when their conceptions of how to handle the further development of Prussia and Germany drifted apart significantly.

During his activity as the charge d'affaires in Darmstadt Heinrich Alexander was able to acquire further competence in the fields of customs and trade through participating in the negotiations for the German Custom Union. His acquired expertise in that area strongly influenced his appointment as legate to Brussels.

In this function he succeeded in concluding a trade-agreement with the kingdom of Belgium in 1844 that was very important for Prussia. Treitschke gives an assessment of Heinrich Alexander's personality in his "Deutsche Geschichte" and reports about the conclusion of the trade-agreement in the following way, "At that time the legate in Brussels was Heinrich Alexander von Arnim, one of the romantic friends of King Friedrich Wilhelm's youth. He had once delighted the salons by showing intellect and being witty, but has recently turned towards more liberal views. He always thought great of Germany's power and glory.(...) On September 1st 1844, he approved the trade-agreement acting on his own authority. Nonetheless, Heinrich Alexander received warm praise from the King for his unauthorised handling of the affair." ¹

Besides this agreement another important Prussian-Belgian project was brought to a conclusion during Arnim's time as a legate, namely a train connection between Brussels and Aachen. It was hoped to tie Belgium closer to Prussia as far as trade and commerce was concerned and to lessen the French influence. Moreover there seemed to be a chance to bind the Belgian king from the House of Saxony-Coburg closer to the Deutsche Bund (= German alliance). The railway line offered good chances of opening the Belgian ports for Prussian trade and commerce. Two months after this agreement had been concluded, King Friedrich Wilhelm IV wrote to Heinrich

Alexander “I have just signed the order which makes you, my dear Arnim, a privy councillor.

With the greatest satisfaction I am announcing this to you personally, thereby allowing me to underline in how high regards I hold your services, which you have achieved by boldly and swiftly concluding the agreement with Belgium not only for our Prussian but also for our entire German Fatherland. (...) You must feel as much as I do that, if God’s blessing remains upon it, your treaty will be the first step to win back Burgundy for Germany. (...) The letter concludes with “Fare well and live cheerfully on your laurels. May God be with you! Friedrich Wilhelm.”¹



Heinrich Alexander Baron von Arnim, ca. 1842

During his days in Brussels, Heinrich Alexander von Arnim wrote a manuscript under the title “A trade-policy document” (‘Ein handelspolitisches Testament’), which he first presented to his King in 1844 and it was published and reprinted several times in 1846. “In this meaningful and witty document he opposes colonialism and advocates a national commercepolicy based on a system of specific customs duties”.

¹ The basis of his idea were the theories of the national economist Friedrich List, however Arnim extended List’s ideas on his part and aimed to convert them into practical regulations. He saw that customs duties for the protection of the domestic market alone were not sufficient to foster economic expansion. He demanded a money market with a “well-organized customs union bank” that would be more than a national- or state bank by providing inexpensive capital nation-wide. In addition he asked for “the establishment of warehouses within this customs union so that the domestic market could be penetrated more easily. On the whole a prospering economy would increase levels of affluence across the nation and thereby bring closer the prospect of German unity.

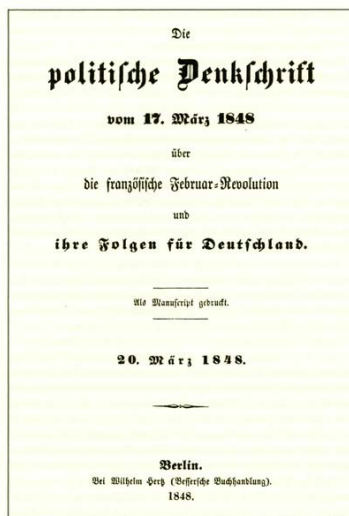
Shortly after commencing his post as a legate in Paris his beloved Betty died in October 1846, which led Heinrich Alexander to develop a very close relationship to his twelve-year-old daughter Else until his death.



Betty's grave in Paris

In Paris, Arnim proved to be an attentive observer of the events that resulted in the revolution. He was capable of interpreting the signs accurately and reported about the threatening danger of an uprising to Berlin, which was - however - not appreciated. When he hastily returned to Berlin immediately after the February-revolution in Paris he intended to protect the Prussian monarchy from a similar disaster. By personally describing the revolutionary events, their causes and consequences and especially through his memorandum “Die politische Denkschrift vom 17. März 1848 über die französische Februar-Revolution und ihre Folgen für Deutschland” (= Political Memorandum on the French February-Revolution on March 17th 1848, and its consequences for Germany) he urged his King to make constitutional amendments. “Ceaselessly he worked towards Prussia one the one

hand putting the liberal demands of that time into effect while on the other hand positioning itself as a heavy armed and ready leader of any movement for German



unity”³ Under the pressure of the revolutionary unrests beginning in Berlin on March 13th King Friedrich Wilhelm IV was initially willing to follow Arnim’s political ideas. He appointed him as Foreign Secretary (= USA: Secretary of State) on March 21st. Albrecht von dem Bussche writes about it, “[Heinrich Alexander von] Arnim was the prominent head in the crisis. The King gave him free reign and the other ministers (USA: Secretaries of State) accepted his leading role.” Not so the prime minister at that time, Adolf-Heinrich Graf von Arnim-Boitzenburg (1803 - 1868), who immediately resigned from his office because he could not share the responsibility for the new political objectives.

Writer of this memorandum: Heinrich Alexander Baron von Arnim

However, only a few weeks later the true differences in opinion between the liberal-minded progressive advisor Heinrich Alexander von and his absolutistic-minded and again half-heartedly acting monarch became too obvious. The King, like his father before him, was not willing to make concessions for a constitutional constitution (i.e. a Prussian variety of the time, a system of government in which the monarch was to keep his divine rights and a constitution was to lay down the democratic rights for the people). In the field of foreign policy the differences became considerably greater. The King was no longer prepared to support Arnim’s Denmark policy with regard to a threatening Danish annexation of the Duchies Schleswig, Holstein and Lauenburg. In addition the two had differing opinions concerning Polish diplomacy, as Arnim was in favour of a strong Poland that would protect against Russia.

A break between Arnim and the Prussian King became inevitable when the King gave in to ideas of the “ministere occulte”, a highly conservative shadow cabinet around General Leopold von Gerlach (1790 - 1861) which endeavoured to counteract the decisions of the ministry of state under Ludolf Camphausen (1803 - 1890) and Arnim’s work, too. On June 19th, 1848 the King granted Arnim his resignation.

Another important event needs to be mentioned in this connection: Der Deutsche Ritt (= the German horse ride). Under the impression of the barricades and the unrest in Berlin’s streets, King Friedrich Wilhelm IV accompanied by his ministers, his generals and the royal princes made a ceremonious horse ride through the streets of Prussia’s capital. He agitated for German unity under Prussia’s leadership in a proclamation. The horse ride and the proclamation went back to Arnim’s initiative. In his unpublished works the handwritten and edited draft of the proclamation signed by the King was found: It says among other things, “Rescue from this doubly threatening danger can only come from the most deeply felt unity of the German rulers and its people under one leadership - and I take over this leadership today during days of the danger. My people who do not shy away from danger will not abandon me and Germany will join me with confidence. Today I have put on the old German colours and myself and my people have taken up position under the venerable banner of the German Reich... Prussia will henceforth be wrapped in Germany.”¹ Black-red and

gold was the banner that was carried in front of the King during that ride; black-red and golden ribbons and cockades were shown. These colours were the insignia of the Lützower Freikorps (= volunteer corps). They were then taken over by the "Burschenschaften" (= student fraternities) and also became the movement for unity's colours. At a later stage, the three colours black, red and gold evolved to symbolise the liberal-democratic objective. Thus the liberal-minded Arnim supporting democratic reforms had certainly seen the symbolic power of these colours. Yet, his King was more inclined to interpret it in a different way. He attributed the colours black-red and gold romantically to the coat of arms of the Holy Roman Empire of German Nations, which had become extinct in 1806 - black the eagle, red the tongue and the talons, gold the background of the coat of arms.

Did a significant stumbling block come to light on the day of Arnim's appointment as minister when he assessed the next political steps to be taken? The histrionic horse ride was soon rejected by the conservative powers. The spark had not spread to the public. Heinz Gollwitzer's comment, "As an advisor to his King during the critical March days, especially as the spiritual father of the so-called "Deutschen Umritt" (= German horse ride through the capital) he [Arnim] did not have a lucky hand (...)"³. In the following weeks the Prussian King himself abandoned the idea of a united German Empire more and more, as it would have been a stigma of revolutionary origin. He wanted to become the head of the Reich by being elected by the German rulers, his equals. Thus Heinrich Alexander von Arnim also tripped over his not yet mature objectives; only three months after taking up office he received his dismissal as minister of state and was put at the King's disposal.

For Arnim, a phase in his life began in which he worked as a politician more than anything else. The following months of the years 1848/49 he spent in Frankfurt am Main predominantly in order to participate in the debates surrounding Germany's first parliament, the German National Assembly in the Paulskirche in Frankfurt am Main. He was never a member of this committee but he belonged to the group of interested and engaged politicians who consulted with the representatives and who wanted to influence their ideas and opinions. Arnim worked in the group called "Casino" which was given its name after the place at which the group met. There the representatives of the "rechtes Zentrum" (= right centre) met. Their objectives were pragmatic parliamentarism, constitutional monarchy, unity of the federal states of Germany with a powerful central government under a hereditary emperorship. His memorandum "Die sogenannte Mediatisierungs-Frage" (= the so-called question of mediation) was published in the autumn of 1848 and dealt with the status and the administration of the small states in a German federal state of the future. On the one hand all of the small states were to be preserved, on the other hand fragmentation of the new states was to be prevented. Basically it was about the amalgamation of the smaller states to a bigger one or about a common administration of the smaller states by the bigger ones.

In the spring of 1848 the representatives had finally come to a conclusion. The Paulskirche had decided for itself. The hereditary, constitutionally drawn up German emperor's crown was offered to the Prussian king. Arnim enthusiastically believed that he had achieved his life's political objective. But King Friedrich Wilhelm IV rejected the crown. According to his opinion the Paulskirche was not legitimated to award a crown, as it did not agree with his concept of the doctrine of divine rights. In

a letter to the Prussian legate in London, Karl Josias Bunsen (1791 - 1860) he wrote on May 7th, 1849, "One only accepts and rejects a thing that can be offered – and you there have nothing to offer: that I will settle with my equals; however, the truth at the end: Only soldiers help against democrats!! Farewell, FW."

One can well imagine how disappointed Arnim was, but actually he should have known his King better and expect this reaction. Later he responded to his daughter's question to explain the failure, "It was not the right time yet! You do not give away apples that are not ripe yet."

In order to continue to take part in the political development Arnim managed to have himself elected into the Upper House of the Prussian National Assembly in 1849. He took up residence in Berlin and kept an open house in which family, friends, politicians, scholars and artists met regularly. Besides he was aiming to introduce his



Heinrich Alexander
Baron von Arnim, ca. 1852

daughter into Berlin's society. His frequent correspondence reveals him to have been a man who took part in political and social events regularly and whose advice was called for. In between the sessions of parliament he was travelling a lot, not only to remain in touch with people across Germany and Europe but also more often to support his frail health by leaving to the countryside.

From 1850 onwards he settled down in Linschoten in the Netherlands, the family estate of his spouse Betty, that his daughter Else had inherited in that year. There he found a totally new task in managing the possessions on behalf of his daughter, who was only 16 years old at that time.

As a member of parliament he held regular speeches and always spoke openly in case he considered it necessary. He had prepared two speeches on the problem of the Prussian Schleswig-Holstein policy for the Upper House. Both of them were printed and published in 1851 under the title "On the policy of the counter-revolution in Prussia" ("Zur Politik der Contre-Revolution in Preussen"). Arnim attacked the government harshly and accused it of having broken international law. He claimed, too, that the government had submitted to pressure from Austria and "thereby it had harmed the honour (glory) and the reputation of Prussia enormously." Arnim was taken to court, whose sentence ended mildly in the hearing at the second instance. He was summoned to pay 200 Thaler. The costs of the litigation were remitted. Arnim seemed indifferent towards the court ruling, as it was more important for him that his political convictions had found a larger audience in this way, even if his extensive and much praised speech for the defence was not allowed to be published. Nevertheless, it had been taken notice of. His political creed here again culminated in the sentence, "What we wanted, what we have always wanted is Germany's unity and power by Prussia, with Prussia, in Prussia."

Shortly before Arnim's death, an argument that had smouldered for almost 20 years between him and the royal Herald authority about the title of baron came to an end. By the highest Cabinet order, Heinrich Alexander von Arnim had been raised to the status of baron in August 1841, however the appropriate Herald authority had never drawn up the necessary certificate as the two parties were not able to agree on the

expenses incurred. When in 1860 Arnim still denied to pay the reduced minimum charge of 139 Thaler it was decided that the incurred costs were to be carried by the cash desk of the Herald authority and “that the same [Arnim] will not be attributed the title of baron in official decrees.”¹

The year 1860 is characterized by the rapid deterioration of his health. Arnim is seized by restlessness both internally and externally. He wanders from one place to another as often as his state of health allows, visits friends, goes to health resorts, again and again he is laid up and unable to travel. Paris, Heidelberg, Munich, St. Moritz and Montreux. Suffering from a liver disorder, dropsy in his legs, short-winded owing to a heart condition – all this worries him. Constant medical treatment becomes necessary and so his daughter and her husband, Friedrich Wilhelm Freiherr von dem Bussche-Ippenbunck known as von Kessel (1830 - 1897) urge him to move to Düsseldorf permanently. The two have taken residence nearby on the Bussche-estate Hackenhausen where they are better able to nurse their father. At the beginning of November he finally moves to a residence in Düsseldorf, where he suffers severe burns while applying the prescribed treatment of hot ethyl alcohol baths. He only survives the last three weeks of his life under high doses of morphine. Heinrich Alexander Freiherr von Arnim is relieved from his suffering in Düsseldorf on January 5th, 1861.

In the firm conviction that the truth - his truth - had to triumph in the end he chose a defiant “nevertheless” as his motto. This was printed on the sheets of his writing paper. This was the engraving in his signet ring.

Selected works among others

Ein handelspolitisches Testament, Berlin 1846

Die politische Denkschrift vom 17. März 1848 über die französische Revolution und ihre Folgen für Deutschland, Berlin 1848

Promemoria, betreffend die Regulierung der Vertretung des deutschen Reichs im Ausland, 23. 7. 1848 Frankfurt und Berlin, Frankfurt 1848

Die sogenannte Mediatisierungs-Frage, Berlin 1848

Zur Politik der Epigonen, Berlin 1850

Zur Politik der Contre-Revolution in Preussen, Berlin 1851

References

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² Buch, Marie v.: Else von Arnims junge Jahre, Leipzig 1929

³ Gollwitzer, Heinz: Alexander Heinrich Frhr. von Arnim-Suckow, in Neue Deutsche Biographie, 1. Band, Duncker u. Humblot, Berlin 1953

⁴ Abbildung aus: Bussche, Albrecht von dem: Heinrich Alexander von Arnim, Biblio Verlag Osnabrück 1986

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