

The Continental Consequences of the Assassination of August von Kotzebue

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Background Information:

- In 1815, the German Confederation was formed after Napoleon and his army destroyed the Holy Roman Empire. Germany was divided into different states, each ruled by a monarch.
- Liberal nationalist student organizations in universities, who accused monarchies of tyranny, called for a unified German nation-state.
- August von Kotzebue was a conservative and monarchist playwright who had ties with the Russian Tsardom. His ideas were opposed by the nationalist and liberal student dissidents.
- Karl Sand, a university student, stabbed Kotzebue, calling him a “traitor of the fatherland.”
- Sand was venerated by some as a hero, justifying his assassination of Kotzebue.
- The event was used as an excuse for kings to crack down and ban those liberal organizations.
- The diplomatic correspondence studied in this research has never been transcribed or analyzed.



Assassination of August von Kotzebue, 1819

Results:

- After the murder of August von Kotzebue, Austria and Prussia immediately pushed structural controls over universities and proposed measures that explicitly matched what would later become the Carlsbad Decrees.
- Ruling authorities issued sweeping reforms of universities, speech, and press to get ahead of what was feared as a nascent movement that echoed the revolutionary sentiment of the French Revolution.
- Diplomatic coordination was led by conservative statesmen such as Klemens von Metternich and circulated among major European powers, demonstrating international interest and concern.
- Diplomats became increasingly anxious about Europe's stability after Napoleon.
- Diplomats warned Metternich that France was accelerating in a dangerous political direction, with revolutionary forces moving rapidly without effective oversight, opposition, or restraint.

Research Objectives:

- Our work hopes to close gaps in knowledge surrounding political extremism and domestic terrorism in the German Confederation, aiming to uncover any potentially unknown justifications and motivations behind policymaking during this turbulent period in German history.
- The purpose of our research is to understand the extent to which August von Kotzebue's death led to press censorship, crackdowns on dissent, and restrictions on academia across the German Confederation.
- We aim to provide greater insight into the perspectives held by Europe's Great Powers on the political developments in Germany at the time.



August von Kotzebue



Napoleon Bonaparte



Klemens von Metternich

Conclusions:

- These results provide insight into the plots and conspiracies that took place in universities in the late 1810's. It also reflects the presence of rebels within German society who tried to break away from the monarchist norms.
- Research around domestic terrorism and political extremism in 19th century Germany is still ongoing. There are many additional documents, correspondence, and other forms of communication that await study and analysis.
- This research reveals many events that transpired in Germany during this time, bringing to light the motives and interests behind the policy changes that followed the assassination of August von Kotzebue.
- It is strongly suggested that future research is conducted on Kotzebue's assassination, as well as additional instances of domestic terrorism that occurred in and around the region during the 1800s.
- Further research will work to uncover more details of the root causes behind the liberal nationalist's will to stand against royal order and create a united German nation state.

Methodology:

Main subjects:

- August von Kotzebue, Karl Sand, Prince Metternich and Viscount Castlereagh.

Methods:

- We transcribed diplomatic correspondence from the National Archives in London, about political developments in the German Confederation.

Materials:

- For non-English documents, we used Google dictionary to decipher foreign vocabulary. We also used Transkribus, an AI-powered platform that converts handwritten and historical documents into searchable, editable text.

Procedures:

- These tools were used to create original annotated transcriptions to better study the perspectives of the European Great Powers on the state of German revolutionary activity.

Data analysis:

- We transcribed, annotated, and took note of every important individual in the documents with titles of nobility.



Map of German Confederation 1815-1866

Resources:

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