

Maximilian, Prince of Baden

By [Karina Urbach](#)



Maximilian of Baden (1867-1929)

In October and November 1918, Prince Maximilian of Baden was Chancellor of the German Empire, in charge of the transformation into a parliamentary system during the “October reforms” at the end of the First World War. This photograph depicts him as general in 1914, wearing several medals.

Unknown photographer: Prinz Max von Baden, black-and-white photograph, n.p., 1914, source: Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-R04103, via Wikimedia Commons, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-R04103,_Prinz_Max_von_Baden.jpg.

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Baden, *Maximilian* Alexander Friedrich Wilhelm, Prince of German chancellor, head of House of Baden, co-founder of the German boarding school Salem

Born 10 July 1867 in Baden-Baden, Germany

Died 06 November 1929 in Salem, Germany

Summary

For many years Prince Maximilian of Baden was portrayed as a positive figure in German history - the liberal Chancellor who in 1918 helped to turn Germany into a republic. This view

has been considerably altered by recent scholarship, including letters discovered by Karina Urbach in 2004.

Table of contents

- [1 Life and military career](#)
- [2 The Last Chancellor of Imperial Germany](#)
- [Notes](#)
- [Selected Bibliography](#)
- [Citation](#)

Life and military career

Maximilian of Baden (1867-1929) was born on 10 July 1867, the son of Prince [Wilhelm von Baden \(1829-1897\)](#) and [Maria Maximilianowna von Leuchtenberg \(1841-1914\)](#). He studied law and joined the Prussian army. His uncle was [Frederick I, Grand Duke of Baden \(1826-1907\)](#). When it became apparent that Frederick's son would remain childless, Max of Baden was told to secure the succession. Despite his [homosexuality](#), he therefore married [Maria Louise of Hanover \(1879-1948\)](#) in 1900 and fathered an heir.¹

At the outbreak of war, Baden served as a general staff officer at the XIV Corps. Even though he had no military responsibilities, he left his post after three weeks because of "nervous problems". Instead he was made honorary president of the Baden section of the German [Red Cross](#), where he focused on [prisoner of war](#) work using his international contacts. However, it was mainly due to the organisational skills of his associate [Joseph Partsch \(1882-1925\)](#) that his work was successful.

By 1915 Baden approached German Chancellor [Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg \(1856-1921\)](#) and offered to mediate with [Russia](#). His aim was to achieve a peace agreement via his Russian relatives. He also hoped to lure [Sweden](#) out of its [neutrality](#) to increase pressure on [Nicholas II, Emperor of Russia \(1868-1918\)](#). His efforts failed.²

The Last Chancellor of Imperial Germany

Max of Baden was first proposed as Chancellor in 1917. The political networker [Kurt Hahn \(1886-1974\)](#) was instrumental in creating an idealized image of Prince Max as a liberal modernizer. This was far from the truth,³ but Baden saw the chance to play a heroic role. Eventually, when at the insistence of [Erich Ludendorff \(1865-1937\)](#) the [Supreme Army Command](#) (*Oberste Heeresleitung*, or OHL) demanded that the civilian [government](#) obtain an

immediate ceasefire, [Wilhelm II, German Emperor \(1859-1941\)](#) appointed Baden as Chancellor in place of the aging Count [Georg von Hertling \(1843-1919\)](#) on 3 October 1918. The idea was to signal to American President [Woodrow Wilson \(1856-1924\)](#) that a reformer had been appointed. However, this backfired when a private letter Baden had written in January 1918 was published. The letter showed that he had previously opposed democratic reforms and a negotiated peace.

From the beginning of his short Chancellorship Baden was never the initiator, but driven by events. During the first half of October Erich Ludendorff demanded Baden should do everything possible to obtain an immediate armistice. Max of Baden had not been aware of the seriousness of the military situation but eventually yielded. During the diplomatic exchange of notes between the German and [American](#) governments Baden continued to make concessions, ending the [submarine warfare](#), and changing the German constitution into a parliamentary system. He even forced the *Kaiser* to dismiss Ludendorff after the OHL attempted to sabotage his reforms and abandon the diplomatic search for peace. The reforms he initiated went entirely against his inner political convictions. In a letter to [Houston Stewart Chamberlain \(1855-1927\)](#) a few years before he had stressed that the “western” model of parliamentarianism could not work in [Germany](#).

Max of Baden also had to change his monarchical beliefs. He had promised to help keep Wilhelm II on his throne, but by 31 October even he accepted that this was impracticable. Though Baden originally wanted to save the monarchy, he did not go through with a plan discussed with [Friedrich Ebert \(1871-1925\)](#). It would have meant making Ebert Chancellor and allowing Baden to stay on as Regent for Wilhelm’s grandson. However, the *Kaiser* refused to abdicate. The pressure led Baden to suffer a nervous breakdown. Nevertheless, he recovered sufficiently and on 9 November, when the [revolution](#) that had spread across Germany during the previous week finally arrived in Berlin, Baden unilaterally announced the abdication of Wilhelm II and [Wilhelm, Crown Prince of Germany \(1882-1951\)](#). Afterwards, Baden fled the scene and Germany was declared a republic.

Max of Baden’s chancellorship had only lasted for five weeks. He retreated to Castle Salem where in 1920 he founded an elite boarding school with Kurt Hahn. During the Weimar Republic he was ostracized by the majority of his peer group. Ex-Emperor Wilhelm II never forgave Baden for “his betrayal”, claiming that if he returned to the throne, Baden would have to leave the country immediately or hang, since “a bullet was too good for that man.”⁴ Baden died of natural causes in 1929, only a year after he had become the head of the House of Baden.

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Notes

1. Machtan, Lothar: Prinz Max von Baden. Der letzte Kanzler des Kaisers, Berlin 2013, pp. 154ff. [↑](#)
2. Urbach, Karina: Go-Betweens for Hitler, Oxford 2015, pp. 103ff. [↑](#)
3. Urbach, Karina/Buchner, Bernd: Houston Stewart Chamberlain und Prinz Max von Baden, in: Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 1 (2004), pp. 121–177. [↑](#)
4. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 107. [↑](#)

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- [Geyer, Michael: **Insurrectionary warfare. The German debate about a levee en masse in October 1918**, in: Journal of Modern History 73/3, 2001, pp. 459-527.](#)
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- [Maximilian, Prince of Baden, Mann, Golo / Burckhardt, Andreas \(eds.\): **Erinnerungen und Dokumente**, Stuttgart, 1968: E. Klett.](#)
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- [Urbach, Karina: **Go-betweenes for Hitler**, Oxford, 2015: Oxford University Press.](#)

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External Links

- [Lansdowne Letter \(National Library of Australia\) \(Primary Source\)](#)
- [Prinz Max von Baden, Erlaß über die Abdankung Kaiser Wilhelms II., 9. November 1918 \(100\(0\) Schlüsseldokumente\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Rede des Prinzen Max von Baden in der Ersten Badischen Kammer am 14. Dezember 1917, in: Baden, Max von: Deutschlands moralische Aufgabe im Weltkrieg: 2 Kundgebungen des Prinzen Max von Baden, Weimar 1918 \(Universität Tübingen\) \(Book\)](#)
- [Urbach, Karina / Buchner, Bernd: Prinz Max von Baden und Houston Stewart Chamberlain. Aus dem Briefwechsel 1909-1919, in: Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 52/1, 2004, pp. 121-177 \(Institut für Zeitgeschichte\) \(Article\)](#)

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