

GERMAN VILLAGES IN CRISIS

Rural Life in Hesse-Kassel
and the Thirty Years' War, 1580-1720

The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) was one of the greatest catastrophes ever to befall the German countryside. This book is a detailed study of how the people of the countryside experienced that war. It examines the village, the central social and cultural institution of the countryside, from several vantage points. Drawing on fiscal records, official correspondence, ecclesiastical and court records, and material objects from the village in the Werra region of Hesse, John Theibault creates a nuanced view of what both the village and the war meant to the people who experienced them.

The village is revealed as the site of competing interests—interests which responded to, and were transformed by, the challenge of war. The situation of villages emerging from the war was as much a product of how they were before the war as it was a consequence of the war itself. Hence the time span of this study, 1580 to 1720.

Theibault's study is a major contribution to recent efforts to reconceptualize the themes and chronology of early modern German history. It also contributes to the broader debate about the relationship between rural life, warfare, and political power in early modern Europe.

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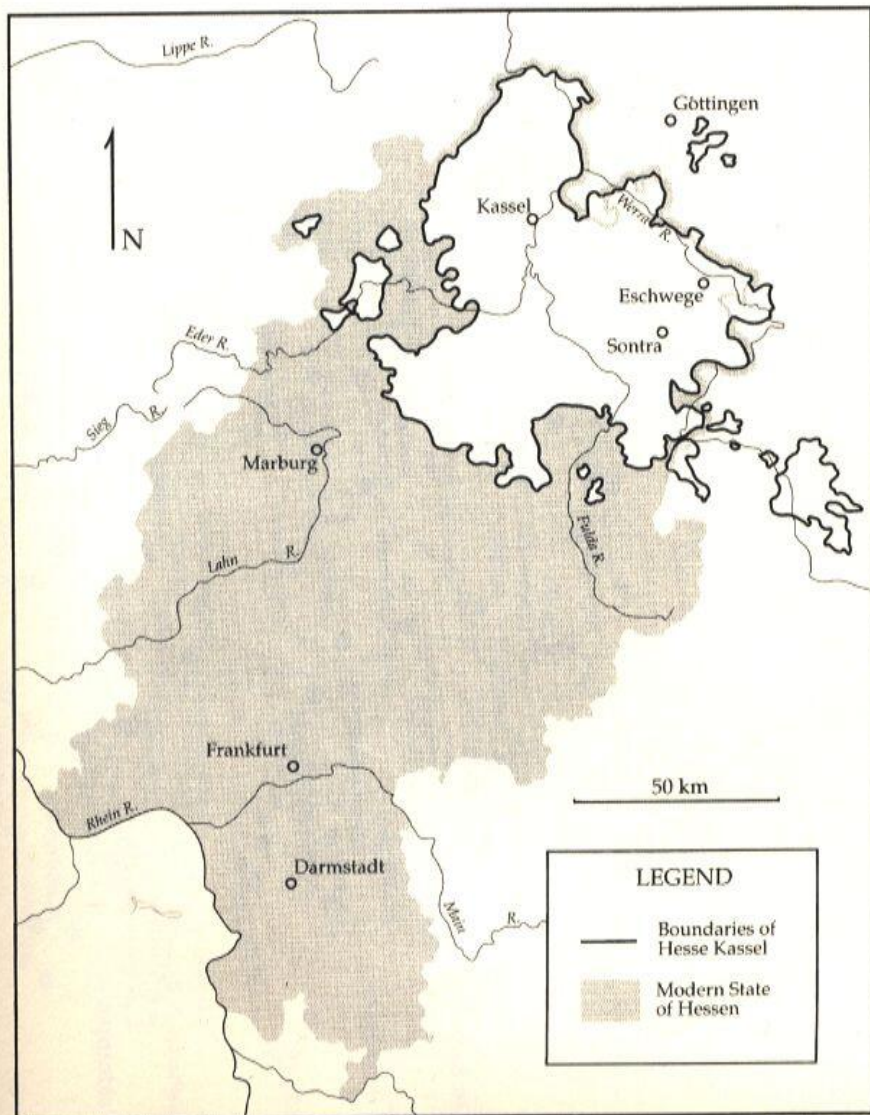
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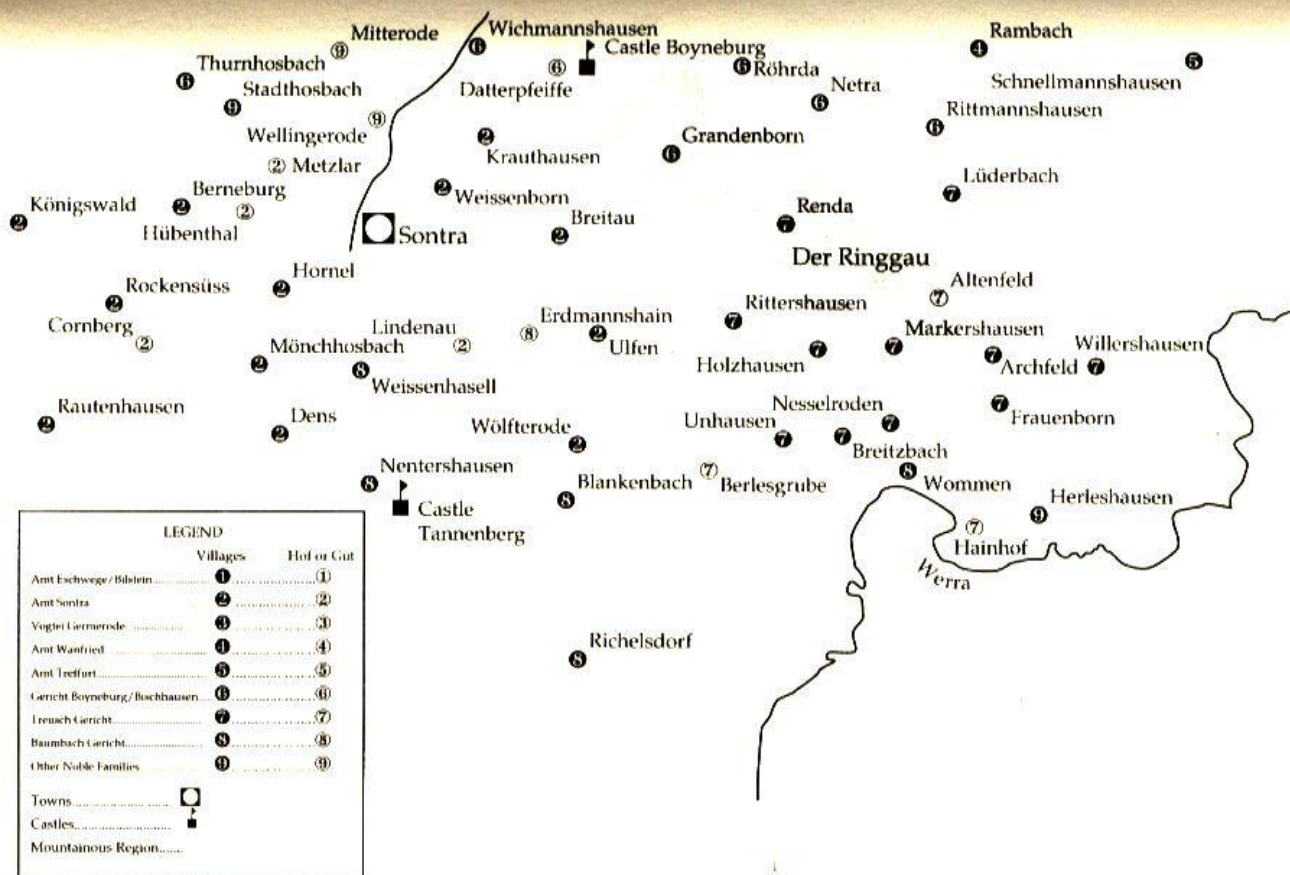
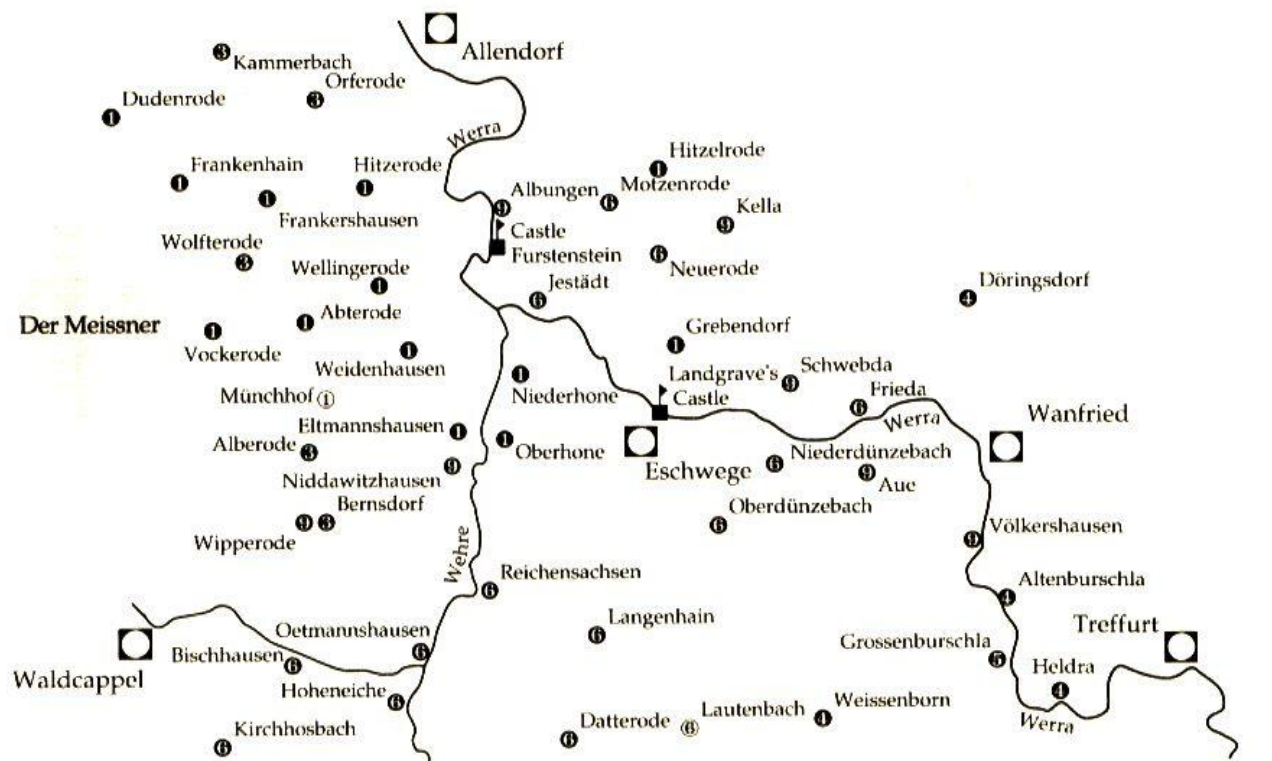


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HESSE KASSEL CIRCA 1580



MAP 2
VILLAGES OF THE WERRA, CIRCA 1600



LEGEND		
	Villages	Hof or Gut
Amt Eschwege / Bisleien	①	①
Amt Sontra	②	②
Vogtei Germerode	③	③
Amt Wanfried	④	④
Amt Treffurt	⑤	⑤
Gericht Boyneburg / Bischhausen	⑥	⑥
Trensch Gericht	⑦	⑦
Baumbach Gericht	⑧	⑧
Other Noble Families	⑨	⑨
Towns	□	
Castles	■	
Mountainous Region		

consideration in all matters. For the villagers, there were neighbors, and then there were outsiders. Even though some outsiders resided in the village, full villagers considered their presence to be an outside imposition, much like the presence of the landgrave's administration.

One group that illustrates outsider status within the village was the Jews.⁷³ Jews posed special problems in determining neighbor status because they were a substantial minority in some villages. Imperial and Hessian laws and customs limited the number of places where Jews could settle, so although most villages were not divided internally by the religious and cultural differences between resident Jews and Gentiles, some were. In the Werra region, the village of Abterode was a major center of Jewish settlement. Some Jews lived in the villages of Altenburschla, Rambach, and Aue as well. The settlement of Jews was constrained by the antipathy and suspicion with which Christian residents viewed the Jewish culture and religion. The territorial administration took advantage of this situation by demanding "protection money" (*Schutzgeld*) from the Jewish community in return for the right to settle in designated areas under the supervision of the landgrave's officials.⁷⁴ Jews were, therefore, residents in the village under special status from the landgrave himself.

The special status of Jews excluded their full integration into the local community. Their access to land was severely restricted, and they were kept from enjoying the perquisites of village membership, such as brewing rights.⁷⁵ Jews were not restricted to specific parts of the village, but many clustered together in poorer houses in the peripheral parts of the village. They formed a separate community within the boundaries of the village and had a separate communal organization patterned on their religious leadership, which underscored their separation from the *Gemeinde*. The institutional separation of the Jewish and Christian communities was reinforced by the different lifestyles of the two cultures. Christians were wont to complain about Jewish violations of the Sunday Sabbath as an act of unfair competition.⁷⁶ Christian pressure on the Jewish community was common but ritualized. As one of the conditions of protection from the landgrave, the Jews were obligated to attend a Christian sermon and prayer each year under the supervision of the *Amtmann* in Eschwege.⁷⁷ The reports of the superintendent indicate that some Jews managed to avoid the sermons and that none were moved to adopt the Christian faith because of their exposure to them. The purpose of these sessions seems to have been as much to make the Jews more conscious of their isolation as to try to convert them to Christianity. In fact, it is unlikely that the Christian community would have been willing to accept members of the Jewish community as full villagers even if they had decided to convert.

Throughout the seventeenth century, the separation of the two religious and cultural groups was maintained. For this reason, Jews seldom appear in the official records. Jews were occasionally the victims of insults or assaults,

but these were not distinguishable from the insults and assaults that the other villagers inflicted on one another. Only rarely were the particular cultural characteristics of Jews singled out for attack. The Jews Calman and Moses of Abterode complained that the villagers threatened to drive them out of the village and forbade them to use maids on Saturday.⁷⁸ Other Jews of Abterode do not appear to have been threatened in this case. Direct attacks on Jews only rarely came to the attention of higher officials but may well have been common. Despite paying protection money, Jews had few advocates who would protect them against the collective prejudices of the villages.

Abterode is the only village where individual Jews appear regularly in the lists of householders. By 1754, over 30 percent of the households there were Jewish.⁷⁹ The percentage must have been significantly smaller in the seventeenth century, however. The introduction of official records for business transactions and debts in the mid-seventeenth century gave many Jews at least one legal document in which their interests were recorded.⁸⁰ Since Jews could not rely on the sanctions of the village community to secure their interests—indeed, could expect that the village community would work against their interests—they relied on the expanding interest of the state in overseeing local economic practice. Of the numerous cases of credit recorded in a "Credit Protocol" in Abterode starting in 1642, more than 20 percent of the recorded cases involved Jews.⁸¹ In contrast, Jews are almost entirely absent from the *Amt* account books and local supplications.

For the most part, Jews made few claims on the local community, and the villagers responded in kind. Jewish interests were not considered when the village wrote a complaint to the landgrave, but outward conflict between the Jewish and Christian communities was rare enough to indicate that the two groups had reached reasonable equilibrium in their relations. The Christian community had written the Jews out of their definition of the village. This is not to say that Jews were not important to the economic life of the village, but they did not attain insider status.

Other religious or cultural groups had a similar status.

- is an example of how difficult it was for officials to fit in with the villagers as neighbors.
70. StAM 318, Niederhona.
 71. Kopiaibuch Klasse Sontra mentions that the pastor in Rockensüß had studied in Hersfeld, Hamburg, Denmark, and Marburg.
 72. Compare Rudolf Wissel, *Das Alte Handwerks Recht und Gewohnheiten*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1971), 148, on how people who were Jews, Turks, heathens, or Gypsies were outside the law and thus dishonorable.
 73. For a discussion of the legal restrictions on Jewish settlement in Hesse, see Karl E. Demandt, *Bevölkerungs und Sozialgeschichte des Jüdischen Gemeinde Niedenstein, 1653–1866* (Wiesbaden, 1980), 24–38. A new sourcebook gives an excellent overview of the ways in which Jews were regulated by the Hessian state before the Thirty Years' War and the consequences of that regulation at the local level: Uta Löwenstein, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Juden im Hessischen Staatsarchiv Marburg 1267–1600* 3 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1989).
 74. StAM Rech II Eschwege 10 and Rech II Wanfried 8.
 75. Only in Abterode did Jews gain any control over land for themselves. Elsewhere, they acted as middlemen but could not hold property.
 76. This appears to have been a very infrequent violation, however. Only once between 1590 and 1648 were Jews fined for violating the Christian Sabbath in Amt Sontra. See Gromes, *Bußen aus den Amtsrechnungen*, 83.
 77. Wilm Sippel, ed., *Forschungsberichte der Stiftung Sippel*, vol. 8 (Göttingen, 1981), 89.
 78. *Ibid.*, 207. It is striking that this is the only reference to Jews in the superintendent's work diary until 1647. I take this as a sign that some equilibrium had been reached between the Jewish and Christian communities of the Werra, though undoubtedly it worked strongly to the disadvantage of the Jews. Moses and Calman's reliance on maids for the Sabbath suggests that they were as apt to shape religious practice to their own needs as were the Christians of the region, regardless of doctrinal strictures.
 79. StAM Kat Abterode B12.
 80. A *Währschaftsprotokol* was begun in Abterode in 1642. StAM Prot II Abterode 4. Although entries involving Gentiles outnumber those involving Jews, the number of Jews that made use of the book is striking in comparison to the near absence of any Jews in the Amt account books and other documents.
 81. *Ibid.*
 82. The case of the pastor in Abterode, Moritz Gudenus, is instructive, though his conversion must have been different because he belonged to a family that was close to the landgrave's. Gudenus later became the Catholic *Amtmann* in Treffurt. Compare StAM 4c Hessen-Rheinfels/Rotenburg 830.
 83. Ki Reichensachsen 1638–1657.