

## AGRICULTURE AS MOVABLE WORLD, PART TEN



### FARMERS ON THEIR WAY

The steep stairs creak. They're narrow stairs, red carpet. They lead to a door that opens to a long, low-ceiling hallway. The hallway curves. Intermittently gape small windows set into wall of stone almost three feet thick. Doors to rooms on the other side. We open one: a bed under rustic bedspread, wardrobe, dresser with mirror, two chairs donning dark-red velvet; a little side room, and a bathroom. The bathroom has a modern feel to it. But the floor tilts under the weight of centuries, in all the rooms. Look out the window to see a large courtyard dominated by an ancient tree reaching for the sky; a couple poplars grow there, too, but the wide-branched linden, or is it a beech?, has a trunk so large, so gnarled, you know it's seen hundreds of years' comings-and-goings in this broad yard.

This is where she ends up in Germany, Lena Lentz Hardt of Lentz Spelt Farms on the Columbia Plateau, on her quest to search out places and landscapes that shaped her forebears' lives before they emigrated to become German Russians under Catherine the Great.

The courtyard is completely embraced by castle buildings typical of a Schloss. On one side rises the tower of the keep, the tall castle proper with its inner

courtyard where lived the Fürst, the prince himself in his dozens rooms so stately with their lavish furniture under scenery wall weavings and oil paintings bigger than life in gilded frames.



The outer courtyard we're now overlooking has on both ends heavy gates set into imposing stone arches.

And through these arches, their forbidding wood-and-iron portals swung wide open, enter farm folk dressed for a journey. The men wear their Bundschuhe, the

sturdy farmer boots that once had been an emblem of revolt on rebel flags; thick wool socks reach up to loose pants that meet the socks just below the knee; a heavy shirt, also worn loosely, is partly covered by a vest of Barchent (fustian). Headwear: black felt hats with brims bending slightly downward. Somewhere on their piled-high wagons there will be a warm coat as well. The women stand in long, simple dresses that gather their bosoms. Their head covering either wool shawl or linen bonnet. As the farmers mingle in the courtyard the colors of their clothing expound their bucolic countenance, we see some whites but mostly the fabrics are the dark, subdued colors of natural dyes of homespun.

They're all young adults. Some couples have small children with them, keeping them close. Others are very recently married, married in a hurry. You watch them long enough, you can tell they're still shy with each other, still sizing up each other and the situation they find themselves in, abrupt and oh-so-different from German village life ordinary.

Horses neigh and paw the cobblestones.

Taking stock of the wagons, scanning the clouds, the men give themselves a resolute air.

We watch them leave, 80 couples in all, they're off through those solemn gates, their wagons clattering on the stone bridge across the moat, their heading east. East, go East young man!



The year is 1765.

We're in the Schloss of the Isenburg princes at Büdingen in Hesse. This castle, this courtyard has eminent significance for German Russians, because those 80 families we just dreamed were the very first emigrants drawn to the Volga by Catherine the Great's



promises. Here in this courtyard that large emigration began, an emigration that stretched for five decades to Tsar Alexander's reign. To emigrate you had to be married, hence many hasty weddings.

An apt place for Lentz to stay on her penultimate night before returning to Frankfurt for her flight home. She's never slept in a castle before. "That was cool." The woman who has us sign the register in the Schloss Hotel office is a family member of the Isenburgs. How things have changed in two and a half centuries. "I thought it pretty nice that they managed to keep the castle in the family all those years," Lentz says. "The woman in the office was a friendly lady, down-to-earth. I liked staying in the castle, though it was a little strange because we were the only ones there, no one else in this big, big old castle. And the taxi driver, he didn't believe we had the right address; it was getting dark, he asked us three times if this really was the hotel we wanted."

Well, at least it wasn't Count Dracula's castle.

In any case Lentz did not curtsy as she'd have done 250 years ago in the presence of an Isenburg Lady. Lentz even dared look directly into Isenburg eyes, without so much as a second thought.

\*\*\*\*\*

According to Michael North in his Deutsche Wirtschaftsgeschichte, between 1685 and 1806 about 400,000 Germans emigrated, some to America (invited there originally by William Penn the Quaker), and many to points east: to Russia

(beckoned there first by Catherine the Great and then by Tsar Alexander I), and to the Lower Danube region (that the Habsburgs wanted to secure against Turkish threat).

In this same period about 350,000 people poured into German lands, some fleeing wars in the Low Countries, many others escaping religious persecution, such as the Huguenots of France who called themselves reformés, the Reformed. Certain German territorial states, and cities such as Erlangen in Franconia, welcomed the Huguenots. At Büdingen the princes also allowed Huguenots in; some of those later went on to the Amana Colonies in Iowa, we're told when we take the Schloss tour the next day.

So, the big picture of the era when Germans left for Russia is one of frequent population movement, into and out of German lands.

Catherine the Great had been quite specific that she wanted an immigration of farmers. They were to establish villages, "colonies," to settle open lands still unsecured against ungovernable tribes and against the Turks.

But we want details: who really were those emigrating "farmers" in the Büdingen courtyard and, later, on the banks of the Danube at Ulm? What were the conditions then in German villages, in the Dörfer they were so eager to leave?

We resort to Unterfinning ©1993, and Ebersberg ©2003, both by Rainer Beck. Unterfinning and Ebersberg are villages in southern Germany, one east, one west of Munich; in his Unterfinning Beck researches "The Rural World before the

Break to Modernity," in Ebersberg he analyzes "The End of Wilderness."



Dorf is often translated as "village" but the correct definition is a closed-system agricultural production area with a village at its core.

Beck notes that if you'd asked a townspeople in the 1700s about nearby Dörfer, the quick and depreciating answer would have been, "Farmers, it's all farmers down there." But lumping everyone in a Dorf together as farmers doesn't do



justice to an actually very complex village economic structure at the time, he points out.

Beck's methodology is to research a village in depth, a Dorf that falls approximately in the middle of the big range of social and political conditions of the era; Unterfinning has soils and climate neither good nor extremely poor, nor is this Dorf a satellite of a major city like Munich but comes under influence – courts and market – of the median city of Landsberg. And whereas Beck repeatedly acknowledges that village conditions varied from place to place, were different even from those in the very next village, Oberfinning, he's confident that Unterfinning serves well as indicator of how lives were lived back then in rural German territory on the whole, excluding the eastern regions.

In the 1700s Unterfinning numbers 50 homesteads/houses; 200 to 250 people live there. The church and probably the mill are of stone, all the rest of the Dorf is built from timber. Much of Unterfinning had to be rebuilt after what villagers still referred to as "The Great War," the Thirty Years' War 1618 to 1648 that overlapped several pestilence pandemics – horror piled on havoc.

The village wasn't exactly spacious; between church and tavern around a central linden tree was an open area, and another one stretched out in front of the smithy; everywhere else, narrow lanes.

In a thousand years (700 to 1700) little had changed in the German farming system. Unterfinning was surrounded by fence and hedge to keep animals from the "gardens" that grew fruit trees on small meadows behind the houses. On the other side of the hedge the Flur, the fields that were tilled in the old three-field system: winter grain – spelt and rye – followed by spring grain – oats and barley – followed by a year of fallow when livestock was turned out on the field. The Flur was held in common by the village, but each field was divided into numerous strips to which specific families held rights. "The Langstreifen ("long strips" of field) were often 10 to 20 meters wide, and 150 to 250 meters long, occasionally 400 to 500 meters long. The smallest of the strips, however, were only just 5 meters wide and lay next to one another in close quarters," Beck writes. A map of the Unterfinning Flur in 1721 shows a perplexing mosaic of strips, the smallest parcels measuring a mere 750 square meters (about 900 square yards), the largest 2 hectares (about 5 acres).

Beck goes on to describe the elaborate logistics of seasonal land use and designated paths required to assure everyone adequate and timely access to their field strips. A high degree of synchronization in farm operations was necessary, he notes.

Past the Flur fields spread grass pastures; the ones on better ground served as hay fields to which specific families had rights, but only from spring until the summer haying was done; afterwards the ground reverted to commons again. Farther out lay gravelly and hilly and swampy land that was also foraged.

Still farther out stretched forest.

\*\*\*\*\*

Beck diligently combs tax rolls, court records, priests' diaries, and the writings of contemporary chroniclers in the wider region around 1700s Landsberg.

Of the total 290 hectares/700 acres of Flur fields (of which only two thirds were actually tilled in a given year), 27 percent raised spelt, 18 percent rye, 18 percent barley, and 37 percent oats.

This farming took up only 28% percent of overall farmland use, the rest was grass because a lot of livestock had to be fed through the long winter in the barns: 52 horses, 176 cattle, 26 pigs, about 80 sheep – these the median numbers for the 1720s.

Beck delves into a long explanation of how minimal sustainability of the Dorf depended on a keen balance between crops and livestock. Too much of one, not enough of the other could affect survival, mainly because manure from the barns served as fertilizer.

As a food source the cow had highest value due to the milk she gave. Even the poorest smallholder kept a cow rather than sheep or pigs. (Sheep milk was not valued in these parts.) Beck notes that the condition of cows varied greatly after a long winter of feeding in the barns, you could tell who was well-off by how his cattle looked when they were driven to the commons' pasture in spring.



They were small cows to begin with, weighing 175 to 225 kilogram compared to the German cow of the 1980s with 500 to 650 kilogram.



Cow's milk: a lot of work went into the two streams of products after raw milk had been separated into cream and skimmed milk. Butter was churned from the cream, which process also resulted in buttermilk. Most of the butter, because of its short shelf life, was further processed into Butterschmalz, "butter lard" that's arrived at by carefully melting butter and keeping it simmering until the water content evaporates. Butterschmalz was the most important milk product, Beck writes. The second production stream, from skim milk, went to either Sauermilch, "soured milk", or to Topfen, a.k.a. Quark, a curdled version. This process had Käsewasser, "cheese water," as a byproduct; Käsewasser made a good drink for the pigs.

We find it curious that these German farmers did not make what we call cheese.

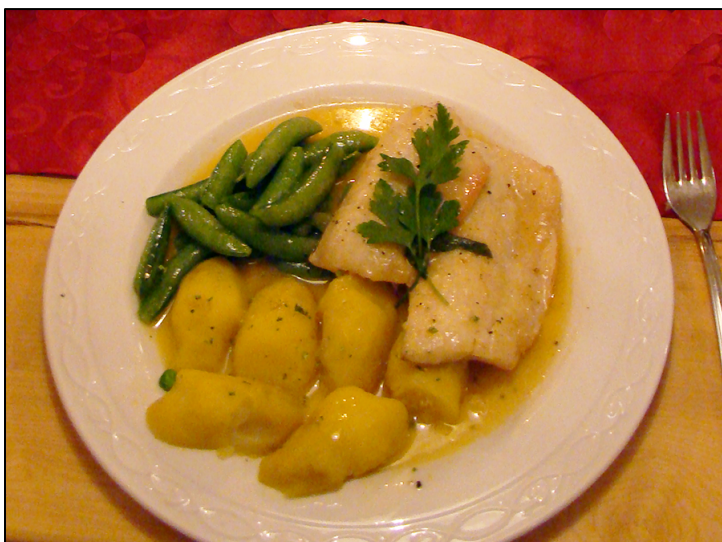
Pigs were valued for their twice-a-year litters of up to 12 piglets, though realistically an average litter of six to seven was more likely.

Horses were preferred for field work because they got the job done faster than oxen; also, the Boten messenger/farmhand boys were embarrassed if they had to put oxen before the cart for their trips.

Beck does not mention any goats. But of fowl there are aplenty in Unterfinning, geese, ducks, chickens, pigeons.

This livestock was managed communally in the warm months, the village hiring herders for three herds, one of cattle, one of horses, the third one of sheep grazing together with pigs and geese. In some villages a fourth herd consisted of calves. In winter each family put up their own livestock in their own barn.

You might imagine a lot of meat consumption, but it was very low indeed, only for the biggest feast days was meat on the table, Beck found: livestock was raised



for sale. "It's certain that the full-farmers, the half-farmers, and the cottagers did not themselves eat (most of the livestock) they raised – partly due to custom, partly because they couldn't afford such luxury."

With his mention of "custom" Beck is referring to the Vergetreidung we've already spoken about, the pressure on farmers to streamline

their agriculture to grain production to fend off hunger when population explosion occurred at various times; in Hans Renes' Grainlands we find that the diet shift to predominantly grain resulted in an average loss in height of two inches, over just a few generations. Thus we must picture our emigrants as people not so tall.

Oh, but they did eat grain, grain, grain, grain as soft gruel (breakfast), as noodle and dumpling in thick soup, as Kücheln – cakes fried in lard – and as various kinds of bread, Beck relates. Also daily in their diet featured one or more of the milk products. And Kraut: "365 days a year," most of it sauerkraut. Five meals a day was the custom. The poorest lived on 2581 daily calories (Kcal), whereas "the diet rich in fat the farmers ate" calculates at 3416 calories. To put this into perspective: the USDA recommends 2600 calories per day for the average man.

So our 18th century farmers live on a diet very high in calories, yet they have no time to work out in a gym.

\*\*\*\*\*

Both sickle and scythe are used in grain harvest at Unterfinning, the sickle on spelt and rye and oats, the scythe on the shorter-growth spring barley.

Before you sharpen those sickles and scythes, straw must be woven into bands that will bind the sheaves.

Harvests commences before the grain is fully mature – "so that the easily scattering kernels save themselves, and don't fall out unnecessarily..." Beck quotes Franciscus Philippus Florinus who wrote in 1702 as Haus Vatter, literally "house father," an early form of economist, although, much of the Hausväter literature in general deals largely with moral issues, Beck remarks elsewhere.

According to Thomas Kaiser, a lecturer at Munich, grain was cut at the dough



stage of maturity.

At harvest the bound sheaves are stacked into upright, circular shocks, for drying in the field, Beck writes.



Kaiser: the most common harvest practice was to put the cut grain auf Schwart, drying it in windrows. Only if there was inclement weather would the grain be bundled and stood up in the field.

When the grain is judged dry enough, harness the horses. It'll be a long, hot job loading the wagon, tossing the sheaves every higher.

Back at the homestead the sheaves get hurled upward again, stacked tightly up high in a barn. Threshing is a job when all the field work has been taken care of, for the year.

According to Kaiser, Beck misses an elemental component in his harvest description, namely the Ährenleser (literally: "grain-head collectors"), the gleaners who picked wayward grain heads off the ground. Broken-off heads could amount to as much as 20 percent of harvest.

On the threshing floor the men swing flails, working "much like metal workers hammer on an anvil" in an offset rhythm, first one, then the other slamming down the flail, Beck quotes from contemporary script. Nothing is wasted, after the threshing of the day the broken straw pieces are scooped up by the farmhand whose job it is to feed the livestock in the stalls, while the intact straw is bundled for later use in weaving.

The loud threshing is accompanied by swish of screens and sieves, to separate out chaff, stones, and other field debris. A few farms already have blower machines – bellows?, fans? – for winnowing inside threshing barns.



Grain storage is a big wooden box built so as to keep the mice out. Every few days one of the hands opens the top and stirs the stored grain to prevent it rotting.

You add all this up, the hard work and the tedium, and it's shocking to read Beck's account of how much of their grain the farmers had to save for seed. In 18th-century Unterfinning the ratio of winter rye grain seeded, to grain harvested was a measly 1:3, and some years merely 1:2 (today's ratio in Germany is 1:25, he remarks). He attributes the low ratio to the wet soil conditions: "...at least 80

percent and in reality perhaps as much as 90 percent of the seed grain rotted in the soil,” Beck calculates, adding that in the 18th century the overall German average of grain seeded to grain harvested was a ratio of only 1:4, whereas in the Netherlands, where a more intensive farming system had developed, the ratio was already 1:10.

In addition to the Flur, Unterfinning also had a large plot of common land called Gemeindekrautgarten (“the commons’ garden of greens”) for raising turnips and Kraut, the cabbage that responds to summer rain with a drum sound.

Alongside a few parcels of the Flur (or perhaps interplanted?) they raised a little flax. Extrapolating from the Zehnt, the 10-percent tithe the priest demanded from the village, Beck figures that two to three Tagwerk, “day’s work” were planted to flax – about 1 1/2 acres to 2 1/2 acres. This would have yielded between 70 and 90 kilogram of processed flax fiber after a lengthy, many-step tedium.

Lastly, the women tended a small herb garden in front of their house. The Landsberg region was known for salad greens, a custom not common across German lands: when taverns served green salad with the meals, travelers from other regions were often taken aback, Beck writes.

But do the chores go on. Think of all those critters in the barns. Every day in the long winters they get cooked feed, a swill consisting of kitchen scraps – including even the water from washing the dishes –, all manner of grain residue, and Grummet – the low-grade hay of short length –, plus the scrapings of straw after threshing. This warm swill was poured into the troughs in the stalls; while the cows slobbered it up they were milked.

And there was, of course, a lot of dry hay feeding, pitch fork by pitch fork.

And stall mucking.

The chores never seemed to end. They didn’t. To come back to those calories: Beck writes that “nobody could work all day in harvest without burning 3500 to 4000 calories.”

And a lot of the other work also took a lot of calorie-energy.

That’s why the Dörfer had no gyms (our comment).

\*\*\*\*\*

We’ve already spoken about how a Dorf was established, from 700 AD on, a dozen or so men clearing forest and plowing ground for the Flur and the



pastures, and only then building the village, at which point all the families had about the same rights to area of tilled strips and pasture, and to village allotments. But by 1700 the differences in village holdings were pronounced, Beck notes: in Unterfinning the farmers who held rights to the largest Flur strips also occupied the largest homesteads, as large as 7500 square meters, while in the upper village the allotments were as small as 150 square meters. Some of the smallholders had a large enough “garden” (fruit trees and meadow) to cut sufficient hay to feed a cow through the winter, while others “had to do without any kind of agricultural production.”

Since the begin of the 18th century the tax administration in Landsberg used a classification system of farmsteads, the “1/1” farmstead, the “1/2,” and the “1/4” farmstead. In 1717 they expanded that system all the way down to “half-1/16.” And so we see that 1717 Unterfinning has two “1/1” farmsteads, five “1/2” steads, five “1/4” steads, and four “1/8,” thirty-two “1/16,” and two “half-1/16” steads.

That’s quite the spread, wouldn’t you say.

Beck’s interpretation of the document, based on various differentiations, is that 12 of the 50 Unterfinning households qualify as farmer holdings. The others, from 1/8 stead on down, are Söldner, cottagers, most of whom also have Flur parcels, but they’re small to very small.



Dorf life: a number of day-laborers were In-Wohner who rented cottages; other day-laborers had their own houses. Beck was not able to obtain much information about the steady farmhands because they lived on the farms where they worked. As for the rest, many were part of quite a vibrant in-village economy: according to 1721 tax records, Unterfinning had four weavers, two tailors, one cobbler; one sawyer, one carpenter, one cabinet maker; one smith; one miller, two bakers, one tavern keeper; and one small-shop keeper. There was also a hatter. Almost all were part-time farmers: the cobbler, for example, had rights to 5.8 hectares, one of the bakers is listed with 4.8 hectares, the four weavers each claim between 0.8 and 2.2 hectares.

Village people seem to have bought just about everything locally when it was available, Beck writes. You wouldn’t think of going to Landsberg for a pair of shoes since there was a cobbler among your neighbors. Beck was able to source

accounting documents from two villages near Unterfinning, 1739 to 1747, with lists of iron and partly-iron farming equipment sales. For carts and wagons and plows, to an assortment of chain types, the villagers went to their local Hufschmied, the farrier; for axes and sickles and other assorted small stuff, they had their local Waffenschmied – literally: “weapon smith;” shovels, harness chains, and a big, big heap of nails they got from the local ironmonger. Merely seven scythes and 19 pitchforks they bought at the Landsberg Market in those eight years.

In addition to local trade, some export was produced at Unterfinning as well, particularly straw hats and woven straw “table carpets” that trading companies distributed to Saxony and Frankfurt, Leipzig, Nürnberg. And, a few villagers were roving peddlers who travelled seasonally, having rigged up crude display cases they carried on their backs, hoofing it. One contemporary account refers to them as “half-farmer traders.”

Another out-of-village source of income was wagon transport. Not far north of Unterfinning ran the Salt Road from Munich to Landsberg; in the 1720s between 10,000 and 15,000 wagon loads a year rumbled down that road. For the small farmers, the one-horse guys, it was an opportunity to get more use out of the horse that otherwise worked only a relatively short period tilling the small acreage; after all, the animal had to be fed wether it worked or not. Beck remarks that hauling wagons was hard on plow horses.

Extreme poverty also existed in Dörfer like Unterfinning, there 19 residents – six adults and 13 children – were on the alms list in 1715.

And of course there was the priest. He fits best in the next context, big burdens.

\*\*\*\*\*

Once a year the residents of Unterfinning paid the prince at Landsberg Leibzins, literally: “interest payment on one’s body.” Beck writes that married couples had



to pay four Kreuzer, widows/widowers two Kreuzer, the four Kreuzer corresponding to about half a day’s pay. “A bagatelle?,” asks Beck, and goes on to say that financially, no, it wasn’t a big deal. But. The Leibzins was a signifier that one was not a free person but that one had an overlord who could



at anytime exercise his “right of control over person and property.”

Serf's the word, or? Beck cites a 1544 document that defines the difference between *Eigenleute* and *Leibseigene*, splitting hairs.

It can be said that by the 1700s, in Unterfinning and across southern German lands on the whole, serfdom had waned. People were free to move. They could marry. They could inherit. What the *Leibzins* implied had “no grave consequences any longer,” but paying that interest-payment-on-one's-body “left an uncomfortable aftertaste and a trace of unsolved unease.” It was, Beck emphasizes, “a latent threat.”

A similar pall was cast on property. Only two farmers in Unterfinning owned their homestead free and clear. All the rest of Unterfinning had an overlord: two churches owned 26 of the steads, five monasteries together owned 10, the *Societas Jesu* owned one, three nobles owned six between them, the citizenry of Landsberg owned one, the community of Unterfinning four.

Quite the mosaic of ownership, isn't it.

Further complicating the picture is that most of the land had at one time or another been stifted, granted to the farmers and cottagers; that made them owners but only nominally, because the *Stift* could be revoked. Meanwhile there was annual payment in *Stiftsgeld* to be rendered. Of course.

Not that the landlords always managed to recall a *Stift*, Beck notes. He came across several cases where no family came forward to take over a farmstead from which another farm family was about to be forcibly evicted. And in one case a woman simply refused to get out, end of story.

“Passive resistance” in so many ways characterizes the farmers' relationship to their overlords, Beck remarks. The upshot: “The farmers and cottagers of Unterfinning... sat quite firmly on their property.”

When a farmstead or cottage changed hands, usually to the oldest son after the father's death, a “*Laudemium*” payment was due. This was carried forward, so that, “in the 16th and 17th century (the *Laudemium*) became the most significant payment for the Bavarian farmers,” Beck quotes from an agrarian-historical analysis.

One table in Beck's tome enumerates all the various landlord payments each of 48 households had to render, a bewildering array of both monetary and farm

goods demanded by landlords and the church. Although, in most cases payment in grain and eggs etc. was converted to payment in coin, Beck points out – as time went on, monetization intensified.

Only for the large farms were payments in grain a considerable part of paying fees and taxes. Beck describes how on the Saturday before St Lucas Day the farmer of House #50 had to hustle to make delivery to the Jesuits' "mighty compound" some miles away. There more than 20 horse-drawn wagons arrive from several villages delivering "...almost 20 tons of grain, 58 chickens, 14 geese, 900 eggs, 6 pound flax." A small part of these loads the farmers rendered in lieu of the Küchendienst, the "kitchen service" they were obligated to perform. In addition they had to pay hefty fee, the year's rent, basically, in coin.

\*\*\*\*\*

Beck follows the Laudemium inheritance fees through the decades from the 1500s on, and describes in detail various legal finagling by the monasteries as they increased this payment from 5 percent of total homestead value to 15 percent, although by the 1700s that was lowered again to an average 9.3 percent. In particular he describes how women were disenfranchised in the process.

What it boils down to is that village life, especially for the 12 farmers, was a constant wrangling with church, prince, state, landlord.

A law from 1616 stated that in the event of crop failure or other drastic misfortune the landlords should reduce the farmer fees. Which they did, however, these reductions usually still left so much fee to be paid that farmers had to go into debt. In 1735, 10 Unterfinning villagers were in debt, in 1737, 12. Of course that meant interest payments on top of taxes and fees for those families. In other years only one to five families were in debt.

In the chapter "Pious Burdens" Beck explains that the catholic church was backed by the state which police-enforced church attendance. Obedience to the church was law.

The priest in Unterfinning had one of the better farms with stable, barn and livestock, Flur fields and pastures. He had his own farmhands. All this was the priest's private property separate from capital and income of the church and two chapels.



There is record of small voluntary contributions to the church, but the mandatory Zehnt, the 10 percent tithe at harvest was the main outlay the farmers had to their local church. Tithing year after year was a real strain on the farmers, Beck notes, especially the part of the tithe that had to be paid in grain. Because the grain Zehnt was collected before the farmers could segregate the seed portion of the harvest, the net sum of grain the priest took was actually much higher than 10 percent, more like 15 percent by Beck's reckoning.

Not only lived village priests high on the hog – they're the meat eaters, guzzling wine –, the church did thriving business when it sent the tithed grain to market.

The church was ravenous for wealth. Birth and christening, burial, death memorial, wedding announcements (three banns to be read before marriage), the wedding proper, the list goes on – for everything fees were collected. For the yearly Kirchweih, the feast commemorating the consecration of the village church, the villagers owed the priest bread, each weighing 4.5 to 5 kilogram, 165 loaves in 1728. Do the math.

To top it off, the House of God had been turned into a credit institute. If you needed a loan you went to the priest. In 1720 the Unterfinning church had outstanding loans of 847 Gulden and 30 Kreuzer (1 Gulden = 60 Kreuzer, the equivalent of about a week's wages). Loans brought in 5 percent interest; half of the cited loan moneys were owed by 17 families in the village.

OK, we move on to the Landesvater, "father of the land" his majesty the prince in whose name the territorial state squeezed the farmers. Not surprisingly, the long-term trend since the territorial state had begun to slowly replace feudalism, was taxes and more taxes, going back to the 1500s when first a biennial and later an annual "Autumn Tax" was demanded from farmers. By the 1650s a multi-tiered tax structure – including a forerunner of the sales tax – was a growing strain on farmers. And, there were a number of moneys the state collected that weren't defined as tax but, Beck points out, for all practical purposes that's what they were. A big one were ("landesherrschaftliche Praestationes") the Hofanlagen, "provisions for the court."



“The high expense to which their taxes added up confirmed for the villagers that it was them who bore the lion’s share of the costs that the prince’s court, and the state, and the military, and the ‘fatalities of the last war’ had devoured and continued to devour,” Beck emphasizes. Yes, it was pretty clear to everybody that neither nobility nor clerics, nor cities and markets, were shearing off much of their income to contribute to the state’s expenditures.

Occasionally there were extracurricular payments as well: in 1728, 1729 and 1730, for example, each Dorf had to pay “compulsory loan moneys” to settle the debts of the governing lord.

Now let’s talk about what in Bavaria was called Schararbeiten, the work farmers had to perform without pay in medieval times (elsewhere called Fronarbeiten). They had Jagddienst, “service during the hunt.” They had to transport all manner of stuff with their horse teams and wagons, fire wood, building materials, salt, you name it. They had to work on the grounds of the court and of the prince’s satellite castles.

From 1665 on, the taxes multiplied steadily for 100 years. One added tax was that instead of the Schararbeiten listed above the farmers had to pay money. They also had to pay “hearth money,” and “forage money,” newly invented. These three new taxes were designed to get maximum money from the poorer in the village, Beck notes. Sometimes it was left up to the village itself to collect these particular taxes, in which case the division of payment was often more even-handed and fairer toward the cottagers.

Have you kept track? Farmer pays fees that are essentially rents to the landlord who’s granted him the farm; farmer pays tithe to the church; farmer pays provision-tax to the prince’s court; farmer pays state taxes, farmer pays tax for hearth, forage, for former service obligations, farmer pays compulsory loan.

(And unlike in Boston, there is no harbor into which to toss tea bales at Unterfinning...)

In contrast to feudalism and its fragmented administering, the territorial state was effective in overseeing the villagers, implementing an “ever tighter mesh of tax collection.” Which is great for research like Beck’s, all those precise figures! But out in the village, no, it must not have been pleasant to get regular visits from Landsberg bureaucrats – they came in twos – snooping around.

Were the increasing and multiplying taxes offset by the grain prices which were rising again in the early 1700s?, Beck asks. Not really, because tax burdens increased twice as much as grain prices did; besides, most villagers didn't produce enough grain to sell, and wages remained stagnant. "There is no doubt that the pressure from the state... became the sign of the times in the late 17th and the 18th century," Beck sums up.

Alas, add high cost-of-living pressure, especially on the 32 households, i.e. 60 percent of the village who had less than the 5 hectares Beck calculates to have been the self-sufficiency threshold. Figuring average day-laborer wage at 12 Kreuzer, the cost of simple food with a little fat and a little beer took up about five of those Kreuzers per day. (If you could afford to purchase Edamer cheese, pike or carp, sugar, fancy spices, and meat, and wine from the Neckar River, why, you could easily spend 40 or even 50 Kreuzer on your day's meals.) A farmer shirt cost between 45 Kreuzer and 1.5 Gulden (1 Gulden = 60 Kreuzer). Shoes couldn't be bought for less than 30 to 45 Kreuzer.

Well, didn't they have big families, didn't all those kids contribute to the economy as they grew up? The big-family Dorf is a myth, Beck points out. In 1721 Unterfinning resided 140 children and unmarried youths, which comes out to 2.7 per household. No word on how many births a woman had to give to have 2.7 children survive in Unterfinning.

Worst case scenario: you have a wife and one child and you're a day-laborer without land. House and heat cost you 4.5 Gulden a year; 8 Gulden you spend on clothing and bed linen; food costs would be 56 Gulden a year. Say you find work on 240 days a year: your income is 48 Gulden. Before taxes.

Strange computations these, aren't they.

One reason why you survive nevertheless is that on days you work you get fed, and fed well. That was the custom then, wage plus meals. And some day-jobs did pay better than 12 Kreuzer, threshers, for example, at one point received 14 to 15 Kreuzer per day. And your wife can go out and make a little money, too, the priest paid 6 Kreuzer a day to a day-laborer washerwoman.

But no matter how you shuffle jobs, you won't ever get anywhere beyond mere survival. And you know it.

Most cottagers, though, did have at least a little land, and though they didn't get anywhere, either, at least they didn't have to fear hunger. Not only could they grow some of their food, they also made a little money from dairy products.

The part-time tradesmen, meanwhile, weren't doing too bad, mostly. The miller did the best, the water power of his mill turning out meal and flour, and also pressing oil, and, it sawed lumber.

The big farmers stand on top on village income scale, they typically have a cushion, financially, Beck notes. But rich they were by no means – "...the differences (in income)... are a much smaller spectrum than what you'd expect considering the difference in size of properties."

Specifics: "Even the biggest farmer who harvested over 100 Doppelzenter grain... ended up with only 18 Doppelzenter he had for sale." (Doppelzenter = 100 kilogram.)

As for political clout, the farmers have the deciding voice in village matters.

\*\*\*\*\*

We've already touched on the constant wrangling, haggling between farmers and landlord, church, prince, state. The problem for farmers in this tug-of-war was that their legal arguments were almost exclusively based on old custom. "In general the farmers were not inclined to forget all too quickly" the rights they'd held in the past, Beck reports. It's just that they didn't have hardly anything on paper. In many cases a court would resort to calling elders as witnesses to "how things used to be," for instance when the priest of Oberfinning and the priest of Unterfinning had a fight over which of them was entitled to a certain farmer's tithe.

That the law sometimes accepted old custom as legal argument, other times not, made for a slippery state of affairs.

We shouldn't overlook the tension between land and population. Enormous fluctuations had occurred, the Black Death wiping out a huge swath of people, then started a steady population increase that, however, crashed again during the Thirty Years' War with its pestilences. Now, as the decades grew in the 1700s, each generation was more populous. What that meant for a Dorf like Unterfinning was that resources were stretching ever thinner. Which didn't exactly make for an upbeat outlook. And, the courts used this resource shrinkage as a means to throttle farmer rights. Beck tells of one instance where the villagers agreed to curtail their wood cutting in one area, because they could see and understand the need there for regeneration; at the time they were told the restriction was only temporary, but they never did get those rights back.



Further, the chipping away on farmer and Dorf rights was changing. A couple hundred years earlier the aristocracy claimed more and more of the villages' commons, that had been one of the reasons in some regions why Revolution broke out in 1525. Back then the nobles mostly wanted more forest for bigger hunts, whereas now the state aims to use the forest to expand its revenue.

The forest was a vital component of farmer survival. German forests then grew mostly deciduous trees, some were mixed stands, either way we must picture much of the forest a fairly open, almost park-like environment after centuries of grazing. Unterfinning traditionally had access to two forests, one was a commons of the village, the other belonged to the prince. The villagers' livestock grazing in these two forests amounted to 15 percent to 20 percent of total feeds, Beck estimates.



In autumn acorns and beech nuts were mast for pigs, and the fallen leaves were raked and hauled to the village for livestock bedding which periodically was taken from the homesteads to the fields as fertilizer. “In this way the forest fertilized the fields.”

And, of course, the forest supplied wood for the hearths, the baking ovens, the drying sheds; every year wood fences were built or repaired; and when lumber was needed the timber was right there, too.

In Landsberg a Forest Court had been established to settle conflicting claims. Some sound petty, such as cases where villagers were fined because they used long poles to beat the acorns off the oaks, which practice of course yielded much more mast for the pigs than having them feed on merely the acorns dropped to the ground – that mast the Forest Court of Landsberg considered legal.

The Forest Court “understood how to foster its own position” as the obstinate quarrels over forest use dragged on, Beck points out.

And that position, though never stated, was apparent – to slowly push farmers out of the forest altogether.

Really to blame is the Aufklärung, the German slant on the Age of Reason, the Enlightenment. We tend to think of that zeitgeist as something really positive, Science! Tell you what, one of those sciences was forestry since Carl von Carlowitz's wrote his *Silvicultura oeconomica* in 1713, and the idea of the

Aufklärung is change from a “natural” forest to a cultivated forest "in the interest of the state's economy." Away with the trees that grow too slow, away with the ones that saw into inferior lumber. "Grow the forest like a field." Naturally, any and all farmer use of forest hampered that scheme. By the mid-1700s German farmers can see the writing on the wall.

Science!: newly developing, agronomy. The agronomists intend to make the Flur produce more. They didn't have to look far, England and the Netherlands already had more intensified – that's the key word here – farming systems with far better output per hectare. Specifically the agronomists advised farmers that they should eliminate the third-year fallow and plant Hackfrüchte instead. Hackfrüchte (literally: crops that you "hack," i.e., hoe) is a fairly broad term covering root crops such as sugar beets, carrots, and – potatoes! (Yes, it took the Germans this long, in many regions not until after 1800, to get the hang of, and taste for, spuds.)

But catch this: without the forest component the livestock numbers drop and so does the fertilizer. We all know what silver bullet science will offer farmers to solve that conundrum, don't we.

On the livestock side, farmers were told to switch to Koppelwirtschaft. Koppel means paddock; the Koppelwirtschaft system added a fourth component to the crop rotation, graze and hay ground of grass-clover mixtures. This paddock system was intended to allow for more intensive grazing than just letting livestock range about everywhere.

The early-day agronomist scheme was relatively quickly implemented in the German east where there were Güter (a Gut is an estate that's a very large, managed farm rather than a Dorf of many farmers), but elsewhere in German territories the farmers didn't take to new ideas, not quickly. Eventually the territorial state would put on pressure. That the state would dictate how they'd have to farm was also writing on the wall for mid-18th century farmers.

Can you blame them for wanting to get out?

The one thing that didn't change, that stayed embedded in the law: “The farmers possess their farm not to make profit but to improve it for the landlord.”

\*\*\*\*\*

The Dorf was unquestionably its own world, yes, but big changes in wider Europe would have been felt there, too, if peripherally. Changes enormous: early

capitalism reared its +head before the 1700s, a switch from an “economy of sufficiency” to an “economy of acquisition,” as Michael North puts it in *Deutsche Wirtschaftsgeschichte*. The once universal catholicism, gone, and, back in the 1500s, a strangely bifurcated message from Martin Luther: on one hand he opposed the trend to capitalism because he realized that it threatened the class-structure society that he loved so much; on the other hand he declared that work was God-ordained. You got to work, pal, and work hard because God wants you to, work is atonement – thus we have this so-called work ethic instead of seeing work as a necessary burden, to this day. Before the Reformation, people had 100 days a year free time by way of Sundays and Saints’ days. Once the religious reformers got done there wasn’t much left of free time for the people. And in the 1700s the still-catholic regions Bavaria and Austria felt compelled to follow suit. Although the Blue Monday for the journeymen in the trades recuperating from Sunday drinking, that custom would remain for a while yet.

.....  
We’d started with the question, who were those farmers? leaving for Russia from the *Schloss* Büdingen courtyard.

The Tsaritsa specifically asked for farmers. Can we assume that this specification was applied in the strict sense, by the tax classification in effect mid-18th century? If so, that narrowed the emigration opportunity to about 20 percent of the rural population.

The question is, did the princes pick the most troublesomely wrangling farmers and send them on their way, or did they put out the word to everyone?



Let’s assume the latter. Most farmers wouldn’t want to go for the simple reason that they were too old. The most likely scenario then would be that it was well-to-do farmers’ second or third sons in that Büdingen Castle courtyard (the first son would inherit and keep the farm going).

How the decision to emigrate was made in the village, here’s how we can picture that, just to have a little sex in this story:



It's dusk in Hintertupfingen. Sepp the farmer has stepped out into the farmyard where, underneath the eaves, he's smoking his pipe. He appears deep in thought.

He looks up when he hears a team of horses. He knows it'll be Melchior, his second son. He waits until Melchior has parked the old wagon and is leading the horses to their barn. Sepp steps out from under the shadows, "Grüß Gott, Melchior."

"Grüß Gott, Vater."

"Did you finish the job out on the Flur?"

"Yes, Vater."

"I want a word with you, Melchior. You've heard of the Tsaritsa's Manifesto?"

"Yes, Vater."

"Does it make you think of going to Russia? Starting your own farm in a brand new Dorf there?"

"Sometimes I contemplate that."

"I've been thinking, what with the good harvest and all, if you wanted to go I could help. I could get stuff together you'd be needing on the long trip to the Baltic port. And after. I'd give you some coin, too."

A long pause.

You have to be married to get permission to go, Father."

"I know, Melchior. Now, I've noticed how you look at that Gretchen. The Sigls' daughter."

Another long pause while Melchior blushes.

"You think she'll have me?," he asks shyly.

"One way to find out. Go on over there, Melchior, and ask her."

And so Melchior gets up to a bit of fensterln (“windowing”). He goes into the tool shed for the long ladder. As he carries that ladder down the deserted lane, he walks slowly, slowly to get his thoughts in order, what exactly he’ll say, how he’ll say it, and how Gretchen will smile in the bedroom dark.

In the dark lane not a mouse’s stirring.

At the Sigl homestead he tiptoes, quietly, oh so quietly, until he’s close enough to stand up the ladder and lean it, ever so carefully, ever so carefully, on Gretchen’s windowsill.

He makes himself as light as he can so that the ladder won’t creak too much as he climbs.

Step by step.

On top he sees that her window is open a crack – it’s a warm night.

He gently pushes the window wide open. He can make out the bed in the room. And from that bed flies a shadow three times larger than his beloved Gretchen. Already Farmer Sigl grips him by the upper arms with his huge hands, shakes him up and shakes him down and shakes him sideways like a spaghetti rag doll. A colossal heave, and Melchior is in the air. “I’ll teach you to come around here for my daughter!”

Gretchen, woken by the uproar, now stands in her window, the next one over.

She watches Melchior flying, flying in a long arc backwards. BIG BUMP in the night. On his back in the tall manure pile, flailing his arms he kicks his legs to get up from the stinking mess that doesn’t want to let go of him.

A giant beetle scrabbling on his back, this Melchior. Gretchen giggles. Oh, she cannot help herself, she bursts into a laugh, a loud, pealing laugh, that’s her laugh. She can’t stop herself.

In the dark and silent village lane Melchior can hear that peal all the way back to his house.

That’s why Melchior never did make it to Russia.

\*\*\*\*\*

In Büdingen, Lentz leaves the Schloss Hotel for a stroll through the old town. It's Brotzeit, "bread-time," supper in the Gasthaus. We stop at one of the restaurants. It's full of people. But one table stands empty. That's all we need.

Lentz has learned to think right quickly about what she'll be wanting to drink, because custom has it that when the waitress brings the menus she expects you to order something to quaff.

But it takes quite a while for the waitress to approach, she's so busy flitting between kitchen and tables with large plates heaped, closely aligned behind one another on her thick arms, oh, the heavy dishes tilt, wanting to fall, the woman's forward momentum the only precarious balance against the threatening crash, splash. Obviously this isn't her first day on the job. She's dancing with all these mounds of steaming German chow, a waltz.

Then she appears in front of us. Lentz will have a beer.

Does Lentz realize that, 250 years ago, these townspeople would have looked down on her? Because she's from a Dorf, a farmer. Bottom rung of the social ladder.

As it is, wonderment in the townspeople's Gasthaus. What's an American doing here, outside of tourist season? Look, she's trying to read the menu. Gee, she's wearing blue jeans, that's so Ami. Bet ya she'll hold the fork all wrong.

A friend back home had told Lentz, "You have to, you absolutely have to eat Bratwurst when in Germany."

This Gasthaus makes their own sausages, so that's what Lentz orders.

The walls, besides the requisite stag heads staring, display round metal brewery shields of a century ago.





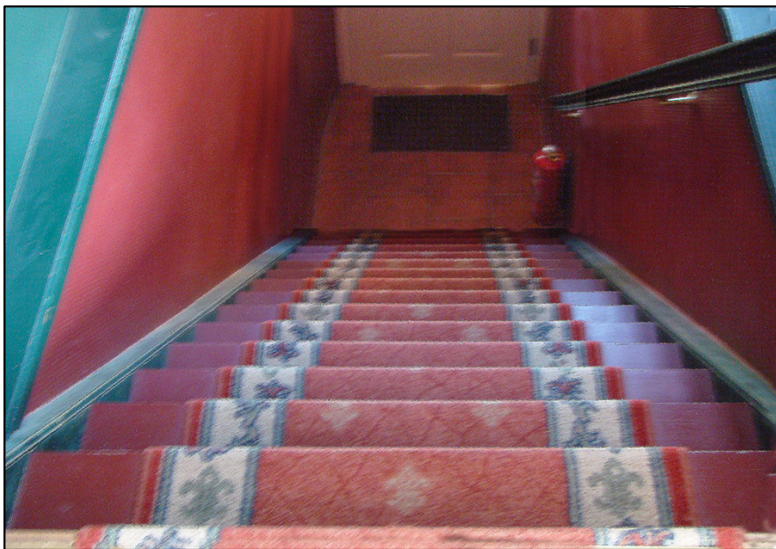
The humdrum hum of German conversations provides counterpoint to dish clatter from the kitchen.

Then the meal arrives, waltzing.

How were the Bratwürste? Lentz frowns at the memory. “I should have ordered something else. They were too rich, too fatty for my taste, two big honking pieces of pig meat. Not to my taste, I’m not much of a meat-eater. Although I do like bacon.

“I remember when my parents made sausage, they were 3/4 ground beef, and a little pork. I loved those sausages. We’d eat the ground beef raw when deciding if the seasoning was right. My Dad always cautioned me not to eat too much of the raw meat and spices.”

By the time we leave the Gasthaus, Büdingen broods late-winter calm in the night. Our steps echo from houses that, though in very good repair, do lean toward one another. Otherwise not a whole lot in these old-town streets is different from how they looked and felt 250 years ago.



Then the big castle looms.  
Darkly.

The steep stairs creak.

They’re narrow stairs, red  
carpet.

They lead to a door.

**2015 Lentz Spelt Farm**