Priestly Resistance to the Early Reformation in Germany

Jourden Travis Moger
PRIESTLY RESISTANCE TO THE EARLY REFORMATION IN GERMANY
Religious Cultures in the Early Modern World

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PRIESTLY RESISTANCE TO THE
EARLY REFORMATION IN GERMANY

BY

Jourden Travis Moger
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IN MEMORIAM

Thomas Sizgorich
(1970–2011)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The more I do research, the more I realize that it is a team sport and not an individual effort. Over the years the list of teammates to whom I owe thanks has grown long. I want to acknowledge with gratitude the members of my doctoral committee at the University of California, Santa Barbara: Abraham Friesen, J. Sears McGee, Sharon Farmer and Ann Plane. As I was completing the dissertation that became this book, I learned of the untimely death of a colleague and friend from graduate school: Tom Sizgorich, Associate Professor of History at the University of California, Irvine. This volume is dedicated to his memory.

Funding for this project was provided in part by a year-long J. William Fulbright Grant. I am grateful to the German-American Fulbright Commission, the Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität in Frankfurt am Main, and Luise Schorn-Schütte, who provided expert guidance as my sponsor. Additional support came in the form of two summer fellowships from the Institut für Europäische Geschichte (IEG) in Mainz. Special thanks go to the two directors while I was there, Irene Dingel and Heinz Duchhardt, as well as to my mentor, Rainer Vinke. The US Naval Academy provided leave and travel funding for this project. I am grateful to my supportive colleagues there, especially the history department chair, Richard Abels.

At Frankfurt’s city archive, the Institut for Stadtgeschichte, I received copious amounts of expert advice from Roman Fischer and Michael Matthäus. In the reading room, Irene Kubisch and Alfred Zschietzschmann provided assistance by ordering and reordering books and manuscripts.

I owe a debt of gratitude to series editors Fernando Cervantes, Peter Marshall and Philip Soergel. Phil Soergel provided valuable guidance from the earliest stages of my research and shepherded the manuscript to publication. In the research stage, I received insightful advice and kind hospitality from Hans Medick and Sigrid Jahns. Tom Scott read my chapter on the urban revolt of 1525 and offered helpful suggestions. Steve Hallmark read and improved the wording of the final text and saved me from numerous mistakes, but I take full responsibility for any remaining errors. Bill Lively prepared the index as a gift of friendship. Thanks also to Janka Romero at Pickering & Chatto for her immaculate copy-editing.
Finally, my greatest thanks go to those closest to me. My first debt is to my parents, Robert and Sandree Moger, for their unwavering support and love over the years. My mother (who was born and raised in Frankfurt as Almuth Müller before she married an American soldier, moved to the United States and changed her name) took a keen personal interest in this project. My children – Natalie, Nadine, Madeline and Mark – have patiently endured many separations for a project they did not choose. I appreciate them more than they know. My final thanks go to my wife, Amelia, for believing in me and making all things possible.
**ABBREVIATIONS**

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>ADB</em></td>
<td>Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie, 56 vols.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>AE</em></td>
<td>'Acta das lutherische Religions- und Kirchwesen betreffend', or 'Acta Ecclesiastica.'</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>AFGK</em></td>
<td>Archiv für Frankfurts Geschichte und Kunst.</td>
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<td><em>AmrhKG</em></td>
<td>Archiv für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte.</td>
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<td><em>ARG</em></td>
<td>Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Battonn</em></td>
<td>J. G. Battonn, Oertliche Beschreibung der Stadt Frankfurt am Main, 7 vols.</td>
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<td><em>Bmb</em></td>
<td>Bürgermeisterbücher.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>BSt Urk.</em></td>
<td>Bartholomäus-Stift Urkunden und Akten.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>DB</em></td>
<td>G. L. Kriegk, Deutsches Bürgerthum im Mittelalter, 2 vols.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>IfSG</em></td>
<td>Institut für Stadtgeschichte (formerly Stadtarchiv), Frankfurt am Main.</td>
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<td><em>LfB</em></td>
<td>Liebfrauenbücher.</td>
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<td><em>LexMA</em></td>
<td>R. Auty et al., Lexikon des Mittelalters, 10 vols.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>LTK</em></td>
<td>J. Höfer and K. Rahner (eds), Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche, 10 vols.</td>
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<td><em>Niederquell</em></td>
<td>T. Niederquell, Die Kanoniker des Liebfrauenstifts in Frankfurt am Main, 1519–1802.</td>
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<td><em>Rsp</em></td>
<td>Ratschlagungsprotokolle.</td>
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<td><em>SCJ</em></td>
<td>Sixteenth Century Journal.</td>
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<td><em>TB</em></td>
<td>W. Königstein, Tagebuch des Canonicus Wolfgang Königstein, ed. G. E. Steitz.</td>
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<td><em>Qu. II</em></td>
<td>R. Jung (ed.), Frankfurter Chroniken und annalistische Aufzeichnungen der Reformationsszeit.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Taschenbuch</em></td>
<td>H. Grotefend, Taschenbuch der Zeitrechnung des deutschen Mittelalters und der Neuzeit.</td>
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UB I  

Liebfrauenstift Urk.  
Liebfrauenstift Urkunden und Akten.

WA  
INTRODUCTION

This book tells the story of an obscure sixteenth-century Catholic priest and chronicler named Wolfgang Königstein (c. 1490–1559), making extensive use of the unique record book he kept at the beginning of the Reformation in the imperial city of Frankfurt am Main, Germany. The venue of Königstein’s chronicle is particularly important because, as scholars have long realized, early Protestantism was primarily an urban movement that ‘penetrated the imperial cities far more deeply than the other estates of the empire’. Like Frankfurt, most imperial cities followed a similar path: the Reformation first took hold among a small group of elite humanists, then grew into a popular movement, before finally being officially adopted by a cautious city council. For Frankfurt the standard study is Sigrid Jahns’s account of how the Reformation was implemented in the city. However, Jahns’s book focuses on politics, taking a balanced but noticeably Protestant approach to the topic. While this present study uses many of the same sources as Jahns, it focuses on culture and individual experience rather than political history. Instead of examining the political processes that drove the Reformation forward, the emphasis here is on how this religious revolution changed daily life and religious rituals, and especially how it affected the lives of those who remained Catholic in a now overwhelmingly Protestant city. This new research makes clear that the main effects of the Reformation were not, in fact, political.

Frankfurt’s city government continued to be dominated by a patrician oligarchy, and after a period of rebellion it remained nominally under the authority of a weak Catholic emperor. Even in the urban revolt of 1525 during the German Peasants’ War, the demands of the rebellious townspeople were not for a reordering of social and political structures but for greater religious and economic freedom.

This study demonstrates that the Protestant Reformation affected every personal experience from baptism to burial. It changed what people ate, how they ordered time, how they worshiped, how they perceived the sacred and profane, and how they cared for the poor. The Reformation limited the vocational choices of women, taking away the religious life as an option. Miracle-working priests became truth-telling preachers.
Not everyone was happy with those changes, including Königstein, who chronicled all of the significant turning points of the Reformation in Frankfurt in his extraordinary record. This study uses it, as well as numerous German and Latin archival sources, to trace the declining fortunes of the Catholic community in Frankfurt as well as the general impact of religious reform on urban culture.

Indeed, little is known about him other than what he relates about himself in his own journal. He was born in Frankfurt around 1490 in a ‘middling’ (mittelmessig) burgher family. His father, Johann Königstein (called ‘zur Weinreben’), was a wool weaver, who died around 1500 when Wolfgang was still a boy. The family’s wealth and social status suggest that the father did not ply the trade himself. Despite their financial means, the Königsteins were not members of the patrician class.

Königstein’s mother, Elizabeth Greff, whom he mentions repeatedly and fondly in his diary, came from the nearby city of Hanau.

After his father’s death she remarried a man named Johann von Ostheim, called ‘Schefferhenn’ (Hans Schaeffer), whom his stepson called ‘my dear father’ when he fondly eulogized him upon his death in 1524 as ‘an honest and circumspect man’. A treasurer and fellow canon at Königstein’s Church of Our Lady named Heinrich Greff, who died in 1530, may have been Königstein’s maternal uncle. Königstein mentioned Greff’s sister Margareta and her son Conrad, at whose baptism Königstein was godfather.

He also mentioned his brother-in-law Conrad, presumably Margareta’s husband and young Conrad’s father.

The wedding of Königstein’s sister’s daughter Barbara to a Lutheran named Hans Meder of Würzburg rounds out the list of family members identified by name.

Of Königstein’s education, we know nothing other than what can be inferred from his text. He wrote partially in Latin but mostly in German. Out of 508 entries, twenty-nine are wholly in Latin, or nearly so, and another seven are at least half in Latin. Many of the others mix German prose with some Latin, especially formulaic phrases such as ‘done on the above year and day’ (actum anno, die ut supra). Although he began writing his journal solely in Latin, he switched to German mid-entry only two weeks later. His problematic Latin suggests an education at one of Frankfurt’s three church-run grammar schools, which trained priests like Königstein.

It is unlikely he attended university. His name does not appear in the published matriculation records of any university in German-speaking lands. It is highly improbable that he studied elsewhere, as study abroad was something only the wealthiest could afford.

That Königstein’s family was financially well off is clear from the diary. On 31 January 1527, Wolfgang and his mother purchased an annuity of sixty-six gulden, sixteen shillings for a thousand gulden. She also donated a vestment decorated with pearls to Königstein’s collegiate chapter at the Church of Our Lady, which he wore to say mass (discussed in Chapter 6). Königstein lived with his mother in a house on Stone Street (Steingasse) until they sold it and
Königstein moved into a prebendal house in the Töngesgasse. After that, they may have lived together in Königstein’s assigned prebendal house called zur goldenen Wage (Golden Scales).

Königstein recorded his work in three ‘books’. The first two, covering 1520–31, survive in the original manuscripts in Königstein’s own hand. Two nineteenth-century printed editions of Königstein’s diary contain all three books, but they rely on different copies of book three, covering 1531–48. The original manuscript of book three was lost some time between the seventeenth century, when copies of it were first made, and the nineteenth century, when editors had to rely on those copies. The first two books include 102 leaves (203 pages with writing) and 447 entries in a small (20.5 cm x 16 cm) quarto volume bound with leather-covered boards from a later period. Because of the limitations of the primary source material beyond 1531, this study is limited to the period 1520 to 1533, following the story only down to the official adoption of Protestantism in Frankfurt – a reasonable terminus for this study.

Despite its many personal and journalistic entries, Königstein’s text was clearly not intended as an autobiography or memoir. Although under the strictest definition, Königstein’s book cannot be classified as an ‘ego document’ or ‘self-testimony’, it certainly can be read as such. This approach is consistent with the growing trend in recent scholarship to treat letters, account books, chronicles, diaries and other literature as ego documents, whether or not the works are autobiographical. In a sense, every writer writes about him- or herself, regardless of whether the work is intentionally self-referential. Königstein clearly made personal choices about what to include and what to leave out, how to arrange and present his topics, and he occasionally expressed his value judgements, often in the form of prayers. A careful reading reveals much about the document’s author, his mentality and his world. Many fascinating details of everyday life shine through Königstein’s narrative, providing a means of ‘getting at’ history from below.

Both of Königstein’s nineteenth-century editors labelled his work a ‘diary’ (Tagebuch) – a title that has stuck – even though neither the German word nor its Latin equivalent (diarium) appears anywhere in the original. Moreover, his work lacks the qualities of subjectivity and self-reflection that characterize the genre of ‘diary’ as defined by modern literary scholars. Königstein called his writing an ‘account’ (Register, registrum): ‘In this account one will learn about both spiritual and secular matters dealt with in our chapter, and also what now or then has been said and done’. Thus it was often used as an account book in which business transactions of the Church of Our Lady were memorialized, decisions of the chapter preserved and personnel changes noted. But unlike the other account books from Our Lady, in Königstein’s hand the text became something more than a mere list of facts and figures. Besides ecclesiastical business matters, the author described many events not directly related to
the functioning of his collegiate chapter at his church. His reporting is generally reliable, though he made occasional errors, especially concerning details of events far from Frankfurt. Königstein tried to avoid speculation when he did not have what he considered a reliable report, and he signalled the limits of his knowledge.

He reported local happenings including an arson attack in the Jewish ghetto and the elections of mayors as well as such international news as the founding of the University of Marburg by Landgrave Philipp of Hesse or the sack of Rome in 1527 by Charles V. Extreme weather and epidemics are noted, as are festive occasions such as the weddings of prominent individuals and the election and coronation of a new German king. Königstein also described important religious events such as Martin Luther’s appearance before Emperor Charles V at Würzburg and the Marburg Colloquy. He also chronicled all of the significant turning points of the Reformation in Frankfurt. Therefore Königstein’s work is best described as a mixed genre of account book and chronicle, though for variety’s sake, the text is referred to by terms such as ‘diary’, ‘journal’, ‘chronicle’, ‘record’, ‘record book’ and ‘account’.

When he began his writing in 1520, Königstein was an ordinary canon and had no statutory requirement to keep an account book. Then why did he write it? If it were an official record book, either an account book or minutes of the chapter, one would expect even more of such entries, and the journalistic reporting and personal comments would seem out of place. A historian might also anticipate more specific entries, describing the functions of an office within the collegiate chapter similar to that of the chamberlains for whom the keeping of account books was required. If, on the other hand, it was meant to be a personal journal, for Königstein’s use alone, one would expect fewer and less formal business entries.

The first entry gives us a clue as to its actual origin and intended purpose. Königstein inaugurated his text with the reception of the new dean, Johannes Cochläus, into the chapter. These two events are likely not coincidentally but causally related. There are at least two possibilities. The new dean, realizing that there was no official secretary in the chapter, may have, in addition to Königstein’s collateral duties and his statutory duties of a canon, actually assigned him the task of keeping a journal of a more general nature than the existing account books. Of course, it is also possible that Königstein may have begun the account on his own initiative, with or without the approval of the dean, though it seems more plausible that the dean either assigned or at least approved the project.

Although there are many things that can be learned from this source, there is also much more historians might wish Königstein had recorded. He does not tell us what he read, for instance, or how he spent his leisure time or what he ate and drank. He usually does not tell us what he thought about what he reported. His often laconic account represents the literary opposite of the work authored by his contemporary Hermann Weinsberg, a loquacious Cologne lawyer who wrote a three-volume ‘Memory Book’ (Gedenkbuch) on a broad range of subjects.
over more than fifty years. Königstein’s opinions must be gleaned from ejaculatory prayers and comments at the end of his journal entries, but much is left to speculation or inference from other sources. Fortunately, numerous sources from Frankfurt have survived from the period and help fill in the gaps, such as chronicles, town council minutes, statutes, wills and other documents. Still, even more fell victim to World War II; roughly 65 per cent of the municipal archive’s pre-war holdings went up in flames. Catastrophic wartime losses make the survival of Königstein’s diary all the more fortunate.

Many books provided models for this study, but the one that directly inspired this project was Eamon Duffy’s *Voices of Morebath*, which tells the story of a conservative English vicar and parish priest named Christopher Trychay. Sir Christopher, as he was called, went to Morebath in 1520 and may have begun his church wardens’ accounts at the time – the same year Königstein started writing his journal in Frankfurt. Despite many similarities between the two men, the English vicar became a reluctant Protestant, while our German priest remained a devout Catholic until his death – even after his hometown outlawed his religion, shuttered his church and made him perform manual labour on the city’s new fortifications. This book explores Königstein’s experience of the early Reformation from the ‘losing’ end.

It would be overreaching to draw broad conclusions based upon just one specific example – whether one cleric, one church or one city. This study does not claim to support a comprehensive thesis about ‘priestly resistance to the early Reformation in Germany’ as a whole. Rather, by focusing on one municipality, Frankfurt am Main, and telling the story from the viewpoint of a single person, Wolfgang Königstein, this account attempts a highly textured reading of the Reformation to show its effects on ordinary people, especially those like Königstein, who clung tenaciously to the Catholic Church in the face of a Protestant tidal wave.

This study begins by investigating the structures of Königstein’s world in Chapter 1, then turns in Chapter 2 to his specific, institutional context – the Church of Our Lady and its chapter of canons. The next three chapters proceed chronologically. Those readers wanting a narrative overview of the Reformation in Frankfurt should skip directly to Chapter 3, which treats the earliest beginnings of Reformation in Frankfurt from 1520 to 1522. The period prior to and including the German Peasants’ War of 1525 and the urban revolt in Frankfurt is the focus of Chapter 4, then Chapter 5 takes up the period after the Peasants’ War through the official introduction of the Reformation in 1533. The final chapter considers the role of rituals and religious change in Frankfurt. It is to the exploration of Königstein’s world that we now turn.
We can grasp an essential trait of the late medieval urban community if we characterize it as a 'sacred society'.

Bernd Moeller, *Imperial Cities and the Reformation*

Wolfgang Königstein grew up in a world of rapid change. A generation before his birth, Gutenberg had invented movable type printing just 35 kilometres downstream from Frankfurt, at Mainz where the Main joins the larger Rhine river. Printing and literacy were on the rise, enriching sellers at the Frankfurt book fair. Commercial networks and record-keeping thrived in a symbiotic relationship, with each supporting and increasing the other. Although Königstein never mentioned the Americas in his record book, their rediscovery by Columbus took place when he was very young. Cities like Königstein’s Frankfurt am Main were becoming larger, richer and more independent. But the world was changing in some ways that Königstein and his fellow religious conservatives did not appreciate. To understand the effects of the Reformation that they resisted, it is helpful to survey their world as it was before the first Protestant winds blew through the city. An exploration of the physical, political and social structures of Königstein’s world not only provides a backdrop for a discussion of the Reformation, but also helps explain his exterior as well as his interior life. Like the city itself – with walls and gates, barriers and openings – these structures both limited and expanded Königstein’s physical and mental horizons. It is to these structures we now turn, beginning with the population and geography of Frankfurt.

In the early sixteenth century Frankfurt was a city-state, called a ‘free city’ or ‘imperial city’, with a large measure of autonomy from its sovereign, the Holy Roman Emperor. Aristotle remarked, ‘A great city is not to be confounded with a populous one’. Such was the case of this imperial city. A middle-sized German town, Frankfurt had reached a population of around 10,000 by 1520, which represented a return to the height of population in 1385 after a period of decline in the late Middle Ages that brought the population down to 7,600 by 1500. Thus Frankfurt was far smaller than large German cities such as Nuremberg, Cologne and Augsburg, and comparable to cities such as Mainz, Trier, Ulm,
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Basel and Münster. It was also roughly the same size as Matteo Ricci’s Macao in the late sixteenth century. Frankfurt’s status as a fair city and election site of the German kings made the city on the river Main much more important than its size suggests. It is also helpful to remember that Frankfurt was twice the size of Zwingli’s Zurich and five times the size of Luther’s Wittenberg. Still, Frankfurt was a face-to-face community in which virtually everyone knew everyone else. Speaking in general, Bernd Moeller observed that ‘The town was not, therefore, a purely utilitarian association but was rather the place to which the life of each citizen was bound’. Political deliberations, religious disputes and social conflict were highly personal affairs, unlike some of the more recent, anonymous mass movements of modern society.

This highly personal environment existed in a unique geographical setting, and many of the events recorded in Königstein’s chronicle show the historical importance of geography for Frankfurt’s history. The sixteenth century was generally a time when people were tied closely to the land and lived at the mercy of the seasons and the natural elements. Geography did not determine everything in Frankfurt, but it would be impossible to understand the city’s economic, political or even religious significance without first knowing something of the physical characteristics of Frankfurt and its surrounding territory.

The city, whose name signifies a Frankish river crossing, occupied the intersection of major north-south and east-west overland trade routes and straddled the major German east-west waterway, the river Main. The bridge over the Main – there was only one until 1848 – connected Frankfurt proper with its south-bank community of Sachsenhausen. Time out of mind it had been one of the few dry crossing points on the Main, joining northern and southern Germany. Because of this advantageous location, Frankfurt became the ‘intersection of European long-distance trade’. It was also a city of strategic significance, especially for movement of troops and supplies in times of war. Perhaps because of its central location, Charles the Great ‘Charlemagne’ summoned a synod to this previously unknown spot in 794, the first mention of Frankonofurd.

The climate and terrain in the area around this central German city provided a favourable environment for agriculture, including vineyards. In the sixteenth century Europe was experiencing what some have termed a ‘Little Ice Age’, when average temperatures were perhaps about 2°C cooler than today, making Frankfurt better suited to viticulture in Königstein’s day. Apple wine, for which Frankfurt is known today, was not produced locally until around 1600. In a 1501 panegyric poem dedicated to the city, an author named Johann Steinwert von Soest mentioned two important locally produced agricultural by-products: wine and beer. Wine was more expensive than beer. When the Dominican monastery in Frankfurt fell on hard times financially, it decided to allow only the older brothers to continue to drink wine. The rest had to drink beer.
Because they were the main readily available potable liquids, beer and wine were not only the normal table beverages but also valuable commodities. Wine was a popular gift (or bribe), a means of exchange in lieu of cash reminiscent of an earlier barter economy, and one of the two main ingredients for the Eucharistic elements. Grapes had been cultivated in the region since Roman times and had become such an increasingly important part of Frankfurt’s agricultural economy that the town council felt it necessary in the late fifteenth century to limit the expansion of vineyards for fear of their taking over land used to grow grains and vegetables. Among its many real properties, Königstein’s Church of Our Lady owned at least one vineyard, which was leased to a winegrower.

Grains, consumed in the form of bread and gruel, were the main food source. The middling sort of people like Königstein and poorer folks subsisted on a diet of cheaper cereal grains such as oats, barley, rye or spelt. The wealthy consumed bread and other baked goods made from wheat. From the early Middle Ages until the early nineteenth century, Frankfurters used a three-field crop rotation for growing grains (summer grains, winter grains and fallow ground during the change of seasons). The city’s farmers – called ‘gardeners’ (Gärtner), as opposed to the ‘peasants’ (Bauern) in the countryside – lived mostly in the northern neighbourhood of Neustadt and were part of the gardeners’ guild, which had a relatively low membership throughout this period, probably due to the fact that most people engaged in small-scale agriculture. Cabbages and onions were produced not only for local consumption but also for export to Rhineland cities such as Mainz and Bingen. Turnips were also raised locally, but potatoes, although known in Europe for some time, did not come into the agrarian economy until the mid-eighteenth century. Various kinds of poultry (chickens, pigeons, ducks, geese, etc.) and livestock (cattle, pigs, sheep and goats) provided protein for wealthier Frankfurters’ diets. In an entry from May 1527, Königstein mentioned a poultry embargo, in which ‘the landgrave [Philipp of Hesse] along with other counts and lords ordered that no one in their lands bring hens, ducks, geese and other such to the Frankfurt market under penalty of ten florins’.

Although one of the world’s most famous sausages in modern times, the Frankfurter, is named after the city, a leading local historian in the nineteenth century could find no mention of sausages for medieval Frankfurt in any of the archival sources. Be that as it may, town council records prove that sausages were available in the city by the early sixteenth century. The middling sort like Königstein would have eaten such protein-rich foods only occasionally and the poor rarely, if ever. During the early Reformation, eating sausages during Lent became an act of protest against Catholic dietary restrictions.

The city’s need for wood for heat and cooking could not be supplied solely from the surrounding countryside. This shortage of wood was a widespread prob-