

ORDINARY PRUSSIANS

Brandenburg Junkers and Villagers, 1500–1840

WILLIAM W. HAGEN



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After the deluge: a noble lordship's sixteenth-century ascent and seventeenth-century crisis

In December 1649, the Baron von Blumenthal's bailiff Johann Lindt signed his "Account of the Ancient Castle and House Stavenow, from the Year 1433 to 1649." As an epigraph to this chronicle, filled with quarrels over ownership and money, Lindt invoked the Christian sentiment that "the Lord's blessing brings wealth without worry and labor." Arriving at Stavenow in 1647, after his rich employer, a powerful courtier, had acquired it in bankruptcy proceedings, the lordship's "totally ruined condition" after the Thirty Years War might well have seemed a lesson in the need for divine grace.¹

The oldest memories of Stavenow linked it to war and plunder. Lindt cited a chronicler's account of how in 1433, during the robber knights' era, the Duke of Mecklenburg captured through betrayal the Stavenow castle, only to spare the warriors occupying it, provided they serve him on request in the future. They agreed with a handshake and a promise, "which counted for more among the nobility of those days than an oath." Whether or not this gallant story was true, Lindt – a sober burgher – "let it pass."²

In 1405, the Quitzow lineage, renowned for warlordism and brigandage, acquired Stavenow. In the late fifteenth century, the Quitzows, beating their swords into plowshares, turned to market production on their broad seigneurial lands. Under the forceful entrepreneur Lütke von Quitzow, Stavenow's master in the years 1515–56, the property flourished, acquiring a structure and extent that survived into the nineteenth century (and, shorn of lordship over its villages, into the twentieth). Lütke's litigious son Albrecht presided for another forty years. In 1601 an inventory displayed the lordship in robust condition, its estates

¹ Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (GStAPK), Berlin: Provinz Brandenburg, Rep. 37: Gutsherrschaft Stavenow, No. 43, fos 1, 11. Further citations from the Stavenow estate archive will bear folder number and folio page(s) alone.

² No. 43, fos. 12–13.

and perquisites paying a handsome income, its villages rendering extensive unpaid labor services and other rents in cash and kind. In 1614, Cuno, one of Albrecht's five sons, inherited Stavenow, borrowing heavily to pay his three brothers their 20 percent shares of the 1601 appraisal value of 50,367 silver Reichstalers.³

Of Cuno, upon whom the storm of the Thirty Years War broke, Lindt wrote:

from the start he could not honor interest payments owed his creditors, so that one of them after the other sequestered the property's various incomes and appurtenances. Thus the Stavenow estates' buildings and other assets were so far ruined, before and during the continuous warfare, that Cuno von Quitzow suffered before his death from want and poverty, and died in misery.⁴

After 1626, the Catholic Emperors' and Protestant territorial princes' warring armies, having invaded and occupied the Brandenburg electorate, contested its control. In the early 1630s Cuno and his family met their end, perhaps from the plague or other disease, perhaps at sword-point. The warring troops camped at Stavenow, murderously plundering until the late 1640s.

As the local fighting waxed and waned, the ravaged lordship's creditors – thirteen burghers and five nobles – pressed for auction. In 1647 Stavenow fell to Joachim Friedrich von Blumenthal, owner of neighboring Pröttlin lordship. He was a diplomat and courtier in the service of Brandenburg's Hohenzollern ruler Frederick William, the "Great Elector" (r. 1640–88). Blumenthal bid 26,360 Reichstalers, half the 1601 value, overtrumping brothers Dietrich and Achatz von Quitzow, the landlords at nearby Eldenburg and their lineage's only surviving members with a Stavenow claim. Yet the Brandenburg nobility's feudal right to succeed a fiefholder enjoyed by all the deceased's brothers and their male descendants limited Blumenthal's title to forty-five years.

³ Hagen, "How Mighty," *passim*, and Sack, *Stavenow*, pp. 77–88. 1601 appraisal: No. 255. It was valued at 67,156 Brandenburg silver gulden (*märkische Gulden*), equivalent to Rhenish gulden, one of the two principal monies of account in early modern Germany, the other being the taler (or Reichstaler). Both were silver-based currencies. 1 Rhenish gulden (fl.) = 24 Lübeck schilling (ß); 1 schilling = 12 pfennig (pf). 1 taler = 24 groschen (= 32 Lübeck schilling); 1 groschen = 12 pfennig. On pre-1618 monetary questions: Karl Heinrich Schäfer, "Märkischer Geldkurs, Preise und Löhne in früheren Jahrhunderten," *Wichmann-Jahrbuch* 1 (1930): 74–7; Wilhelm Jesse, *Der wendische Münzverein* (Braunschweig, 1967), 208–19; Emil Bahrfeldt, *Das Münzwesen der Mark Brandenburg*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1889–1913), vol. II, 528–33. On German monetary and metrological history generally: Aubin and Zorn, *Handbuch der deutschen Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte*, vol. I, 658–75; vol. II, 934–58.

⁴ No. 43, fos. 22, 37.

The Quitzows might then reacquire Stavenow for the 1647 sale price plus such capital improvements as Blumenthal made. They would have another, final chance twenty-five years later, in 1717.⁵

Having recounted these unsentimental arrangements, Lindt congratulated Blumenthal on Stavenow's acquisition "by good title" (*bonotitulo*), wishing him "happy success, rich blessings, peaceful and friendly neighbors, good health, long life, and thereafter eternal joy and blessedness, Amen, Lord Jesus, Amen."⁶ Similar hopes doubtless resounded at the 1647 banquet celebrating Blumenthal's proprietorship. Bürgermeister Georg Krusemarck, lawyer and town councilor in the nearby textile and market town of Perleberg, organized this event, seating numerous guests at nine tables in the long-uninhabited Stavenow manor-hall. To Blumenthal he wrote of the troubles it cost him "to clear out and clean up the house," employing the labor of "unwilling subjects and farmers."

Yet the banquet featured many delicacies: sixty crabs, a fresh salmon, a pike and four eels, salt cod and 100 herring, two rabbits, venison, a wild boar's head and hindquarters, ox-tongue in aspic, chickens and 240 eggs, dried beef, 30 pounds of bacon and two hams, a calf and 61 pounds of other meat, six large casks of beer and twenty small casks of imported wine, including Rhenish Mosel. Much rye bread was eaten, along with 66 pounds of butter and 20 pounds of wheat flour. There was dried fruit and Holland as well as sheep's cheese. Tobacco was smoked, while the Perleberg apothecary supplied spices and other rarities: sugar, saffron, nutmeg, capers, cardamom, raisins, ginger, pepper, almonds, and fresh lemons. The cook earned a fat 8 talers, though "the women who scrubbed and washed day and night in the kitchen for five days" together received but one-sixteenth as much.⁷

Stavenow in these years is accessible to the mind's eye, thanks to Lindt's account and a 1647 inventory. In 1675, upon the expiration of Blumenthal's tenant-farmer's lease, notary Johannes Lindt, bailiff Lindt's son, made a similar survey. These accounts, paired with prewar records, exhibit the lordship as it emerged from the sixteenth into the seventeenth century, and as it was to remain, after numerous improvements, into the early nineteenth century.⁸

⁵ Ibid., fo. 6. Fritz Martiny, *Die Adelsfrage in Preussen vor 1806 als politisches und soziales Problem* (Stuttgart, 1938).

⁶ Ibid., fo. 12. ⁷ No. 278, fos. 1-15. ⁸ No. 32, fos. 1-40; no. 67, fos. 1-33.

THE SEIGNEURIAL HEADQUARTERS

Stavenow lay along the eastern bank of the southward-flowing Löcknitz stream (see map 3). The seigneurial headquarters comprised buildings essential to the manorial economy and the lordship's dwelling places and chapel, fortified and surrounded by a moat. On an adjacent road stood laborers' quarters, an inn, and a smithy. Intersecting it was another road crossing the Löcknitz. The Imperial and Swedish armies, Lindt wrote, had "occupied this area as a pass." But the "dangerous times of war" now over, the bridges were rebuilt and tolls once again charged: 6 groschen for loaded wagons (a sizable fee), 1 groschen for empty.⁹

To reach the seigneurial house, the traveler passed over one draw-bridge and across the terrain of the manorial outbuildings to another. This surmounted a renovated moat and issued through a gate-house onto the manor-hall's rectangular courtyard, centered on a well. In typical seigneurial style, the gate-house was built of brick and timber, with a tiled roof. Flanking its heavy doors were various work-rooms and a plank-floored and glass-windowed dwelling and office with a fireplace for manorial officials.¹⁰ Adjacent stood an ancient, "four-cornered high tower with very strong walls," covered in 1667 with "good oak wood." It housed vaulted chambers, one atop the other. First was the subterranean dungeon, possessing in 1675 "an iron-bolted door [and] prisoners' block with four pairs of handcuffs clamped to it, made from the previous body-irons." The skyward chambers were sitting rooms with fireplaces and chimneys or tiled stoves, or both. The wall of one of them displayed Cuno von Quitzow's likeness, with Quitzow arms opposite and two painted bedsteads, "but without canopies." In others there were "two wicker sitting chairs" and a sleeping-bench. All had windows, some of twelve panes. At the tower's top were eight gables, their windows in 1675 still shattered.¹¹

The tower led into the manor-house, some 112 feet long, facing the courtyard. Blumenthal acquired it with a badly damaged roof and walls, rotted timbers, and "not a single window-pane." Costly repairs ensued. The basement housed two vaulted storage chambers, one leading underground to the tower's dungeon. A courtyard entrance led into a kitchen with a "large and tall" cooking-hearth and a "bread cabinet

⁹ No. 43, fo. 37.

¹⁰ On architectural measurements: No. 668, fos. 1-6. The *Gebind* (*Verbind*)—or space between upright timbers by which buildings were measured—approximated 7 feet.

¹¹ No. 67, fos. 2, 5.

with barred doors.” Above the hearth, foods were smoked. Adjacent was a room with iron-barred windows “where the blessed Frau von Quitzow is said to have lived while lying in.” Nearby were a toilet (*Secret*) and a small vaulted chamber with a heavy iron, broken-locked door. Here the notaries found “three large chests containing all sorts of letters and loose papers,” plus a smashed filing cabinet. The remaining documents they sealed and saved (to the present day).¹²

The second story housed a long, oaken-floored room called the “dance-hall,” with fireplaces at both ends, a dining table, and benches under the nine courtyard windows. Here were a locked liquor cabinet and a large painted chest, both displaying Quitzow arms. Stairs led into a room with a stove, a table with benches, and an “old easy chair.” Further steps led to a small tower with a fireplace overlooking the gardens. An adjacent chamber held a “good canopied bed, a foot-stool, two windows, and a toilet with a door.” The third story contained three bedrooms, with fireplaces and toilets. Above these rooms were decorative gables.¹³

Flanking the manorial hall stretched the three-storied “second house.” A strong entry-door led into a decoratively painted living room with a brick floor. Down a spiral staircase was a large kitchen, communicating with a “kitchen attic” containing – doubtless for cook or servant – a bedstead and toilet. On the second floor were a food storage room, an armory with gun racks, and a room with a tiled stove and four windows “where they say the school was held.” On the third story was “the guest room,” with a floor of green and yellow tiles, a heating oven, and a table with four benches. Adjacent were a bed-chamber, “with two painted bedsteads, one with canopy,” and a sitting room with a fireplace and toilet.¹⁴ The courtyard also housed a stall for sixteen horses and a church. The chapel boasted two gold-leafed chalices (one bearing Quitzow arms) and two plates for the Host which sub-bailiff Jürgen Gerloff “delivered for security’s sake to Bürgermeister Joachim Hasse, of blessed memory, after Perleberg’s plundering in 1639.” The church’s ceiling was wooden, its floor painted boards. The pews were missing. There was an altar cemented into the wall, and a canopied pulpit flanked by “effigies of Dr. Martin Luther” (*D.M.L.*). Adorning the walls were Cuno von Quitzow’s likeness and wood-panel paintings of “old Lütke von Quitzow and his blessed wife” (*Hausfrau*). In the church cellar was a “long kitchen table.”¹⁵

¹² No. 43, fos. 23–4. No. 32, fo. 11. ¹³ No. 32, fos. 8–9. No. 67, fo. 6. No. 709, fos. 168–71.

¹⁴ No. 32, fos. 12–13. No. 67, fos. 7–8. ¹⁵ No. 67, fos. 9–10, 29. No. 32, fos. 15–16.

Departing these headquarters, the traveler returning to the north-south road passed the seigneurial baking and brewing house, slaughterhouse with smoke-oven, swine-pen, and grain-storage barn, very large, with four entrances. A big livestock barn stood alongside a ruined house with a 28-foot living room and two windows. The soldiers plundered and burned many outbuildings but, starting with the brewery, Blumenthal promptly rebuilt them (in brick and timber, with thatched roofs). Ditches and fishponds, now choked with weeds, surrounded them. Behind the manor-hall, toward the Löcknitz, there had been vegetable and hop gardens, flax land, and horse and ox pastures. One of Blumenthal's first concerns, Lindt wrote, was "to have measured out and planted with special delicacies fine gardens for pleasure and kitchen."¹⁶

Across the road stood the inn, some 112 feet long, with gables front and back, masonry vestibule, and thatched roof. But "the soldiery [*Soldatesca*], who often camped nearby, tore down the inn and completely ruined it." In 1571, the innkeeper held seigneurial land for sowing 5 bushels of winter rye and 7 bushels of summer barley and oats. We shall see what food value such measures possessed. He received pasturage for three head of cattle and forage for fourteen pigs. He kept two horses "so that he could, if needed, make trips at the lordship's expense." The inn purveyed Stavenow's beer, paying a yearly lease of 4 gulden (or 3 talers) and, the customary charge upon tavernkeepers, a pound of pepper. Nearby stood the lordship's head plowmen's and livestock herders' houses, each with a vegetable garden and cowshed, but they too the soldiers destroyed. To replace them construction was underway in 1649 on a four-family house some 90 feet long.¹⁷

In 1675, after a quarter-century of poor markets and harsh taxation during which the Blumenthals leased Stavenow to tenant-farmers, the lordship's condition was partly worse than in 1647. Leaseholder Holle, who with his wife departed the property that year, had – like his predecessors – undertaken at seigneurial instruction some improvements. There was a new orchard and a new gardener. In 1664 the inn was rebuilt, with an eighteen-windowed lower room joined by a carpeted staircase to two upstairs bed-chambers, each with two small windows. The downstairs floor was of alder planks "glued together." An entry-gate with heavy doors led to the courtyard and stables. A tall hedge

¹⁶ Ibid., fos. 16–20; no. 43, fo. 25. ¹⁷ Ibid., fo. 40; no. 131, pt. I; no. 705, fo. 128.

enclosed rear gardens and bake-oven. The nearby tile-roofed smithy, 28 feet wide, housed anvil and bellows set on alderwood floor.¹⁸

In 1675 many buildings were “very damaged” and “decrepit.” The former school-room “has completely broken away” while the church had been “removed.” The swineherd and dairy-mistress inhabited the house attached to the livestock barn. Its second story could bear no traffic, the chimney was collapsing, one ceiling beam was broken and propped up, and in the front the timbers had sunk into the ground, requiring a stoop to enter the living room.¹⁹

THE RISE OF EAST-ELBIAN COMMERCIALIZED MANORIALISM

An east-Elbian lordship’s income flowed, first, from its own directly managed demesne land – arable cropland, pastures, meadows, and forest – and, second, from its village-dwelling subject farmers’ labor services and other dues. Further incomes, such as rents paid by millers and artisans under seigneurial authority, varied accordingly. The domanial fields’ breadth determined the yearly rye harvests, sown in the fall and reaped the following summer, and of spring-planted oats and barley, cut after the rye. Until superseded in the eighteenth century, this cereal cultivation system left one-third of arable fallow each year, its fertility to be renewed by grazing (and by sparse plantings of nitrogen-fixing peas, a common food and fodder). Sometimes, too, small flax crops – for linen cloth fiber – dotted the fallow. The other two fields, once harvested, served as pasture before plowing resumed. Meadows, often found along stream-beds, yielded hay which, with cereal straw, kept the manorial horses, cattle, and sheep alive through the wintry days when grazing was impossible.²⁰

Though always exposed to weather risks, grain harvests were improvable by repeated plowings to aerate and weed the land, grazing’s fertilizing effect, and applications of animal manure and mulches. The goal was to maximize seed sown and germinated: the better the soil was tended, the heavier the sowings. Arable land’s customary measure was not spatial extent, but yearly quantity of sowable seed, in bushels (*Scheffel*) and tons (*Wispel* [24 bushels]). In the late eighteenth century,

¹⁸ No. 67, fos. 14–15. ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, fos. 8–10.

²⁰ Hans-Heinrich Müller, *Märkische Landwirtschaft vor den Agrarreformen von 1807. Entwicklungstendenzen des Ackerbaues in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Potsdam, 1967); Abel, *Geschichte der deutschen Landwirtschaft*; Achilles, *Landwirtschaft in der frühen Neuzeit*.

following the adoption of fallow-free rotations, seigneurial seed-yield ratios of rye, barley, and oats at Stavenow averaged 1:4–6. Earlier, harvests of “the third kernel” were satisfactory, while “the fourth kernel” was good. To produce sizable marketable surpluses, seigneurial farms needed to be large. This was true, on a smaller scale, of a lordship’s farmers’ holdings on the village fields, if they were to support numerous households and pay taxes and seigneurial rents.²¹ The broader the pasturage and the richer the meadows, the more numerous the cattle and sheep a noble estate could maintain – valuable both for indispensable manures and butter, cheese, wool, meat, and hides. Forests fattened livestock, especially the multitudinous pigs grazed on autumnal beech nuts and acorns and also fed on the manorial brewery’s by-products, the remnants of tons of barley. Forests were still more essential for the lumber and firewood massively consumed at the manor and profitably sold in the villages and local towns.

The seigneurial arable and pastures demanded many hands and ample horsepower. To secure these on satisfactory terms was noble lordship’s essential economic function (in contrast to its military and judicial purposes). The landlords’ claims on their villagers’ labor and incomes bore the stamp of feudal power and ancient privilege, not free-market calculations. They reached back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when German warlords and frontiersmen conquered or infiltrated the east-Elbian lands of Holstein, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg, Silesia, and Pomerania (all then Slav-settled lands), as well as Balt-inhabited Prussia farther east. Settling colonists and restructuring preexisting villages, they founded an agrarian regime that underwent gradual Germanization, lasting, with many twists and turns, into the twentieth century.

Medieval German society in the east-Elbian lands encompassed villages possessing communally held fields, parceled out in hereditary leasehold tenure to their members’ households, mainly as largeholdings designed to support a cultivator with family and servants while leaving a surplus to pay rent and tithes. In such villages, part of the communal land – typically, two to four times a village farmer’s acreage – supported a nearby manor. This belonged to the entrepreneur or nobleman who

²¹ The Brandenburg *Scheffel* or bushel approximated 1.5 modern Anglo-American bushels and varied in weight by grain type and in volume (slightly) by region. Eighteenth-century weights of the Berlin bushel (similar or identical to that in use at Stavenow) were: rye – 40 kg (88 lbs); barley – 32.5 kg (72 lbs); oats – 24 kg (53 lbs). Abel, *Agrarkrisen und Agrarkonjunktur*, 294. Cf. Müller, *Landwirtschaft*, 203; Otto Behre, *Geschichte der Statistik in Brandenburg-Preußen* (Berlin, 1905), 277 (rye – 45 kg; barley – 38 kg; oats – 25.5 kg). On grain yields: Müller, *Landwirtschaft*, 102ff.

settled the village, or increasingly (as time passed) to an enfeoffed vassal of a higher lordship dominating the locality – whether a magnate nobleman, the church, or a territorial ruler, such as the Brandenburg margraves (bearers, after 1356, of the title of Elector within the Holy Roman Empire). The typical village also possessed lands supporting the parish priest and an enlarged mayor's holding. Serving manorial lords' and village notables' labor needs, a few smallholders were settled, tenurially bound to work as required, without pay or at regulated wages. Largeholding farmers owed the local seigneur but a few days' annual work with teams and plows, and help in the manorial harvests.²²

Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century plague revealed the deadly imbalances that had accumulated between village populations, food supply, and feudal rents. In disease's train, in Brandenburg as elsewhere in Europe, came civil war and noble brigandage and gangsterism. Around 1475, the Brandenburg countryside offered a desolate spectacle. Depopulation by disease and strife had left many villages completely abandoned, others only half-settled. The villages' manorial lords had mostly long since lost their functions and incomes as feudal warriors. Before or during the late medieval crisis, the Brandenburg margraves auctioned off many fief-distributing powers for irregular tax grants from corporate nobility and upper clergy.²³

The strongest surviving manorial lords grew land-rich. To their demesnes they joined, legally or by usurpation, unoccupied subject farms or even whole deserted villages. This expanded lordship over land (*Grundherrschaft*) they paired with strengthened judicial lordship (*Gerichtsherrschaft*), gained by margravian jurisdictional grants and exercised through manorial courts overshadowing the villagers' assemblies. But landlords' wallets and strongboxes were mostly empty. From the late fourteenth century, prices fell with population. Village farmers, if they did not desert their holdings, bid down seigneurial rents. Landlords often pawned to local burghers for ready cash the grain rents their villagers owed them.²⁴

²² On medieval German colonization and settlement: Carsten, *The Origins of Prussia*; Hans K. Schulze, "Die Besiedlung der Mark Brandenburg im hohen und späten Mittelalter," *JbGMOD* 28 (1979): 42–178; Herbert Helbig, *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft in der Mark Brandenburg im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1973); Materna and Ribbe, *Brandenburgische Geschichte*, 85ff; Enders, *Uckermark*, ch. I; literature cited in Hagen, "How Mighty the Junkers?," 83ff, and "Village Life in East-Elbian Germany and Poland, 1400–1800."

²³ Evamarie Engel and Benedykt Zientara, *Feudalstruktur, Lehnbürgertum und Fernhandel im spätmittelalterlichen Brandenburg* (Weimar, 1967); Enders, *Uckermark*, ch. II.

²⁴ Cf. Hagen, "How Mighty," 89–94. On the nobility's legal powers: Friedrich Grossmann, *Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Rechtsverhältnisse in der Mark Brandenburg vom 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1890).

In the late fifteenth century, there began a pacification of society under resolidified princely power and a population recovery which, accompanied by rising agricultural prices, continued into the early seventeenth century. In this long secular trend's favorable setting, many Brandenburg noblemen – Stavenow's Lütke and Albrecht von Quitzow typified them – prospered impressively as enterprising and improving landlords. Like their counterparts throughout east Elbia, they confronted their villages with demands for novel and oppressive labor services. Only so could they avoid paying heavy wages to freely contracted workers for bringing their now-extensive domanial lands under cultivation. The landlords imposed the new labor services as feudal rent, owed the manor for the villagers' possession of their farms, hereditary though their tenures were. The seigneurial court claimed such labor, legalistically, as a public service, akin to road maintenance, underpinning the lordship's exercise of local government.

Although earlier the margraves admonished the nobility against oppressing their subjects with harsh labor, in the sixteenth century the Brandenburg rulers complacently tolerated the landlords' imposition on village cultivators of two or three days of weekly toil on seigneurial land. The Electors more readily relented since they too were great but impecunious landlords, possessing numerous and far-flung princely estates whose managers were proceeding no differently from the landed nobility in recruiting villagers' unpaid labor.²⁵

These aggressive seigneurial initiatives figure in the historical literature as “the enserfment of the east-Elbian German free peasantry,” an episode in the larger development often referred to as the “second serfdom” in central and eastern Europe. This terminology is misleading, since, with few exceptions, there existed in German east Elbia no “first serfdom” such as that of the early medieval west. Still, the valid and momentous point remains that, while the late medieval villagers of the Mediterranean and western European lands cast off the bonds of serfdom to attain legal equality with burghers and other commoners, in

²⁵ On the landed nobility's relationship to the princely state and their economic activities, see, in addition to the literature on individual noble lordships and crown estates cited in the bibliography: Peter-Michael Hahn, *Struktur und Funktion des brandenburgischen Adels im 16. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1979); Peter-Michael Hahn, “Adel und Landesherrschaft in der Mark Brandenburg im späten Mittelalter und der frühen Neuzeit,” *JbBLG* 38 (1987): 43–57; Hartmut Harnisch, *Die Herrschaft Boitzenburg* (Weimar, 1968); Hartmut Harnisch, “Die Gutsherrschaft in Brandenburg. Ergebnisse und Probleme,” *JbFWG* 4 (1969): 117–47; Hartmut Harnisch, “Zur Herausbildung und Funktionsweise von Gutswirtschaft und Gutsherrschaft,” *JbRG* 4 (1972): 178–99; Hartmut Harnisch, *Bauern – Feudaladel – Städtebürgertum* (Weimar, 1980); Enders, *Uckermark*, ch. III; Jan Peters, “Inszenierung von Gutsherrschaft im 16. Jahrhundert: Matthias v. Saldern auf Plattenburg-Wilsnack (Prignitz),” in Peters, *Konflikt und Kontrolle*, 248–86.

east-Elbian Europe in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries an opposing tendency prevailed. The landed nobility, eager to bring their estates into production for favorable domestic and export markets, pressured local ruling princes, such as the Brandenburg Electors, into issuing new statutes binding the personally free villagers to the soil, so that they could not legally combat demands for more burdensome feudal rents with threats to depart to the towns or other lordships.²⁶

In Brandenburg, as elsewhere in east Elbia, the nobility also sought to restrict village communes' access to princely lawcourts, where they might remonstrate against new seigneurial burdens. The Berlin Electors repeatedly endorsed landlordly complaints about their subjects' "frivolous lawsuits" against them. Yet the princely regime, jealous of its jurisdictional sovereignty, never surrendered its right to hear villagers' appeals against seigneurial oppression, expensive though such cases were. It was virtually impossible for individual villagers to bring landlords to justice for wrongs committed against them alone. But the Brandenburg farmer could rightfully quit his holding and move away from his lordship's jurisdiction, on condition – not necessarily easily fulfillable – that he secure a substitute farmer acceptable to the manor-house. Other sixteenth-century pro-landlord legislation obliged subject farmers' children whose labor was not essential to parental holdings to offer themselves to their lordship as farm servants for a period of several years (or even until they married). In such compulsory service (*Gesindezwangsdienst*) they earned room, board, and miserly wages. After the Thirty Years War, statutes expressing the government's and nobility's interest in repopulating the war-torn countryside decreed that subject farmers' sons could not refuse inheritance of parental farms or landlords' demands that they rebuild and occupy devastated holdings.²⁷

Except in Brandenburg's Uckermark and Neumark Districts (see map 3), village farmers' legal subjection did not restrict the right to hold and transmit property, contract marriages, or take action in courts of law so as to qualify them as serfs (*Leibeigene*) and their legal status as serfdom (*Leibeigenschaft*). These terms, familiar from medieval German legal usage and baldly expressing dominion over subjects' physical bodies, had acquired ominous and shameful connotations. They seldom, if

²⁶ On the "second serfdom" in central and eastern Europe: Kaak, *Gutsherrschaft*; Michael North, "Die Entstehung der Gutswirtschaft im südlichen Ostseeraum," *ZHF* 26 (1999): 43–59; Jerome Blum, "The Rise of Serfdom in Eastern Europe," *AHR* 62 (1957): 807–35; Hagen, "Capitalism."

²⁷ Ernst Lennhoff, *Das ländliche Gesindewesen in der Kurmark Brandenburg vom 16. bis 19. Jahrhundert* (Breslau, 1906); Hagen, "Working," and "Crisis."

ever, appeared in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Brandenburg statutes. Nor were they interchangeable with the usual legal term for dependent villagers – *Untertanen* (“subjects”) – or for their personal juridical status – *Untertänigkeit* (“subjection”). The dependency these terms described was not a personal attribute but a consequence of occupying a farm from which unpaid labor services and compulsorily recruited servants could be claimed. In an authoritative formulation of 1790: “subjection clings to the farm” (*Untertänigkeit klebt dem Hofe an*).²⁸

Non-farmholding villagers and their children were exempt from compulsory farm-servant recruitment, though they might agree to work at the manor for prevailing statutory wages. They could quit their native jurisdictions for other villages or for the towns, provided they purchased a release certificate (*Losschein*) from the seigneurial court. Subject villagers were free to marry as they saw fit, so long as they could, whether as laborers or farmers, support to seigneurial satisfaction a household. In reality, exploitative and tyrannical landlords must have been common, though their numbers are unknown. The individual villager, faced with intolerable circumstances, might abscond, but the landed householders sought defense in communal resistance and legal action.

During the new agrarian regime's first phase, from the late fifteenth century to the outbreak of the Thirty Years War, the Brandenburg villagers' anti-landlord litigation, like the impact of heightened seigneurial domination on their personal and familial lives, largely remains to be investigated at the grass-roots level.²⁹ For the following period, from the Thirty Years War to the early nineteenth century, the pages below will measure the compulsion and lack of freedom they suffered, and seigneurialism's other effects on their lives and well-being. Sixteenth-century east-Elbian agrarian laws aimed to neutralize landlordly competition for still scarce farmers and manorial workers and to prevent villagers from bidding down rents and pushing up wages. How far they succeeded in the pre-1618 era emerges from the movement of village dues and manorial services, the value of manorial workers' real wages, the manor's production costs (supplementing the villagers' unpaid services), and from seigneurial net profits.

The landlords' successful burdening of largeholding farmers with weekly manorial service (*Hofdienst*) of two or three days' labor with a team of horses, and the smallholders with corresponding manual work,

²⁸ No. 353, fos. 12–13 (language of the government-mediated Urbarium [see ch. 9]).

²⁹ But see the above-cited works of Grossmann, Enders, Harnisch, and Peters.

was the chief prize of their rent offensive. The farmers' contemporary testimony, and the record then and subsequently of manor-village strife, show that these were well-hated burdens. But, though the historical literature largely holds otherwise, the villagers were not wholly defenseless against the manorial onslaught. A regional investigation with a good claim to representativeness shows that village farm rents, by the late fifteenth century, had fallen (in constant monetary values) well below levels recorded a century earlier in the 1375 Brandenburg cadastre.³⁹ This consequence, favorable to villagers' interests, of the late medieval agrarian depression was unlikely to persist once the downward trend of population, rent, and prices reversed into the long European growth cycle of ca. 1475–1618. The terms of trade, both domestic and international, between foodstuffs and manufactures shifted in the sixteenth century in agriculture's favor. In Brandenburg, tax levies on the villages remained intermittent and tithes commonly vanished following the Protestant Reformation. Farm incomes rose, including those of such villagers as the Stavenow Quitzows' farmers. The execrated new seigneurial labor services were the landlords' cut of their subjects' holdings' expanding value, which might instead have been taken in money or product rents.

Sometimes the villages shouldered the new labor services on condition that previous rents in bushels of grain or ringing coin be held at or reduced below late fifteenth-century levels. The crucial matter was the share of the villagers' surplus, beyond what was essential to household reproduction, that seigneurial rent consumed. We will see that this proved sizable but not confiscatory. For the landlord, the question was whether his villagers' weekly exertions at the seigneurial demesne farms and their children's compulsory service as seigneurial farmhands satisfied his labor needs, sparing him wage bills and production costs he would otherwise confront.

The fine Renaissance houses of the large landowners among the Brandenburg nobility, the late-humanist culture they embraced, and their political strength witnessed their sixteenth-century enrichment. Their rural subjects' unpaid or ill-paid labors earned the landed nobility comfortable or opulent livings, and it is easy to imagine that many Brandenburg villagers shared the utopian anti-aristocratic egalitarianism of the rebels who launched and fought the Peasants' War of 1525 in west and south Germany. For reasons still not fully clear, this great

³⁹ Hagen, "How Mighty," 88ff.

uprising failed to spill over into the northeastern German lands (except for parts of Baltic Prussia).³¹ Historians assume that the east-Elbian nobility's grip on their villages was too iron-clad to be challenged. Yet in comparatively underpopulated Brandenburg, where bowing to seigneurial labor services yielded family farms better than merely self-sufficient, incentives to rebel were weaker than in the more densely settled, land-poor, and heavily taxed German heartlands. In 1572, the humanist Wolfgang Jobsten wrote that "everyone knows the many fine resources that are to be found in the Mark Brandenburg, though they were more available 30–40 years ago than now. Many foreign [German] peoples such as Franconians, Meisseners, Silesians, and Rhinelanders settled there to live." Other early modern writers referred as well to sixteenth-century immigration into Brandenburg, swelled perhaps by flight from the Peasants' War.³² Such contemporary sources as have come to light do not suggest that sixteenth-century commercialized manorialism deterred widespread reoccupation of deserted villages or broke settled villagers' will to stay on their lands.

STAVENOW'S SEIGNEURIAL ECONOMY AT THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY'S END

Pre-1618 landlords did not succeed in shifting all production costs onto villagers' shoulders. Most noble estates needed to employ their own expensive teams of oxen and horses, with voluntarily recruited drivers to lead the way in plowing, harrowing, and hauling. The permanently engaged manorial servants' wages in cash and kind, especially food and drink, were considerable. Converted into money values, they amounted at Stavenow, at the sixteenth century's close, to about 470 gulden annually – a figure that, capitalized at 4 percent, exceeded (at 11,750 gulden) the capitalized value of 8,454 gulden the Quitzow brothers assigned the farmers' weekly labor services in the 1601 estate appraisal (see table 1.1).³³

The Quitzows also leased to "foreign subjects" – nearby farmers not under their jurisdiction – valuable grazing rights in exchange for plowing and other fieldwork which they evidently did not count on their sixty-three subject farmers to finish promptly. Such freely contracted

³¹ Heide Wunder, "Zur Mentalität aufständischer Bauern," in Hans-Ulrich Wehler, ed., *Der deutsche Bauernkrieg 1524–1526* (Göttingen, 1975), 9–37; cf. Franz, *Geschichte des deutschen Bauernstandes*, 131ff; Blicke, *Revolution of 1525*.

³² Quoted in Grossmann, *Rechtsverhältnisse*, 17–18, n. 4.

³³ See table 1.1, below, and Hagen, "Working"

work was reliably carried out, while compulsory labor services were notorious for shoddiness and absenteeism: the appraised value of one day's voluntary fieldwork with a horse-team was six times higher than an obligatory day's efforts. The Quitzows were not unaware of their villagers' labor's defects. They agreed that "even though nowadays [1601] fullholders' services, especially when they are not given food and drink, are rated at 200 gulden, since this is an appraisal among natural brothers, and because it is not uncustomary hereabouts, we reckon the fullholder's service at only 100 talers [133 gulden], and the smallholder's at 50 talers [66 gulden]."³⁴

Still, the Quitzows could take satisfaction in their Stavenow income (see table 1.1).

Though the Thirty Years War ravaged these incomes, in 1647 bailiff Lindt planned to restock the Stavenow seigneurial home-farm with twelve plow oxen and 118 cattle, including 68 new milk cows.³⁵ The 1601 inventory credited every ten head annually with one barrel (*Tonne* [113 liters]) of butter, worth 16 gulden, and one of cheese, worth 4 gulden: "profits from annual sale of barren animals help the lordship's proprietor cover labor and other costs; this is also why prices of butter and cheese are set so low."³⁶ Many swine could be kept at Stavenow. "So too," Lindt fulsomely wrote, "have the poultry, such as ducks and geese, the finest and most useful accommodations that could be found on a landed estate."³⁷ About seigneurial gardens, a 1584 inventory reported that large hop plantings were customary, while "of cabbage, carrots, onions, apples, pears, and cherries much can be sold beyond what is needed for consumption."³⁸

Along the Löcknitz stream stretched seven seigneurial meadows, apart from another leased to village farmers "who could get no hay."³⁹ They yielded, in mowings that began in May at Whitsuntide, 457 large wagonloads (*Fuder* [ca. one English ton]) of hay, all internally consumed as fodder. Across the stream stood most of the lordship's woodland, precisely surveyed following earlier quarrels with neighboring lordships over forest rights. Altogether, they encompassed 740 *Morgen* (420 hectares [1,050 acres]) in hardwood (oak and beech) and softwood

³⁴ No. 255, pt. IV.

³⁵ Cf. no. 705, fos. 22-7, 34.

³⁶ No. 255, pt. IX. Cf. no. 43, fo. 24. 1 *Tonne* = 100 *Quart* = 114.5 liters (Müller, *Landwirtschaft*, 203).

³⁷ No. 43, fo. 24.

³⁸ No. 705, fos. 128-9. This inventory (no. 704, fos. 134-6; no. 705, fos. 127-9), though undated, is doubtless Lindt's "old register" of 1584 (cf. no. 43, fo. 46).

³⁹ No. 131, pt. I.

Table 1.1 *Composition of the Stavenow lordship's market value, 1601 (capitalized at 4 percent)*^a

	Value (gulden)	%
Manor-house and demesne farm buildings ^b	5,813	8.6
Forest income	15,552	23.2
Income from demesne production		
Grain sales	12,104	18.0
Livestock	10,917	16.3
Fisheries and gardens	3,615	5.4
Rent of seigneurial mills	4,400	6.5
Income from seigneurial courts and jurisdictional fees	1,649	2.5
Income from subject villagers' rents		
Fixed rents of Stavenow's subject farmers		
Labor services	8,454	12.6
Rents in grain	1,375	2.0
Rents in cash	864	1.3
Short-term services of "foreign subjects"		
Labor services	1,609	2.4
Rents in grain	804	1.2
Total	67,156	100.0

^aNo. 255, part VI: "Although it is customary in these parts to capitalize properties at 3 percent" – to arrive at high market values – "because this is an appraisal among brothers" and not among "wild strangers," the Quitzows agreed upon a rate of 4 percent (= annual income × 25).

^bNo. 255, part I: "Although originally such buildings cost much more to build." *Source*: no. 255, fos. 1–32. This appraisal set the Brandenburg (märkisch) gulden (reckoned at 24 Lübeck schillings) on a par with the Rhenish gulden (= 0.75 Reichstaler).

(alder and birch).⁴⁰ Good years yielded acorns and beechnuts to fatten 800 pigs. Some of these woods covered the long-deserted villages of Dargardt and Gosedahl, seemingly abandoned because of inferior plowland, patches of which the lordship leased for grain or money rents to neighboring villagers.

Here Stavenow held hunting rights, though a neighboring, land-poor gentry family had earlier feuded over them with the Quitzows. The 1584 inventory remarked of the Stavenow hunt, here and elsewhere,

⁴⁰ 1 *Fuder* = ca. 20 *preussische Zentner*; 1 *Zentner* = 110 *Pfund* = 51.5 kg. The Brandenburg (*kurmärkischer Morgen* (400 square rods [*Ruten*] or 0.5674 hectares) was the standard areal measure until displaced in the late eighteenth century by the Magdeburg *Morgen* (180 square rods or 0.2553 hectares). Müller, *Landwirtschaft*, 203.

that “one can sometimes have big game, such as stags, pigs, and deer.” Still, in 1601 the Quitzows forbore from capitalizing hunting as an asset, saying that it “costs more than it brings in.”⁴¹ Farther away stood more seigneurial woods, enclosing a “beautiful large pond” with “handsome fish” of various types that “stocked it by themselves from the Löcknitz stream.”⁴² The 1584 inventory wrote of the seigneurial fisherman that “he must daily deliver from the Löcknitz to the manor four table fish, if it is a fish day and, if it is a meat day, two table fish, as well as a fish for baking, if one is wanted.”⁴³

Near the manor-house were fenced enclosures, one for horses, one for young calves and plow oxen, “so that the plowmen may rotate teams, unharnessing and returning oxen they drive in the morning and bringing out the others, without need for any special herder.”⁴⁴ The adjacent domanial arable stretched southeastward. All trace had disappeared of the Stavenow village with which the manor had originally shared this land. Laid out – untypically – in four fields, it was large enough for annual sowings of 11 tons of rye, 10 tons of either “rough” or “white” oats, and 5.5 tons of barley. A ton of buckwheat was also sown, some of it – along with peas and broad beans – in sections of the fallow field (“after which the land bears a very good rye crop”). The fallow also bore small flax plantings.⁴⁵ Lindt thought the Stavenow manor-farm, “because it is sandy soil, can be worked at low cost, so that by keeping three plowmen and twelve oxen – allowing for changing of teams once or twice daily – and three farmhands [*Knechte*], everything can be well cultivated without the need for other plows.” The lordship did not depend – except for pre-sowing harrowing – on villagers’ labor services to farm these broad seigneurial acres (which in 1810 comprised 608 hectares, though by then the lordship’s arable had considerably expanded).⁴⁶ Adjacent was a sheep-farm, plundered during the war. Earlier it kept 500 head, grazing them as seasons and plantings allowed. This herd, following the 1601 reckoning, had a capitalized value of 1,333 gulden. Enclosing the plowland on three sides was “a beautiful, pleasant forest” of 480 hectares, with hardwood providing forage for 500 pigs. Lindt recommended rebuilding the nearby brick-kiln, ruined by the Quitzows’ “bad housekeeping” and “impecuniousness.”⁴⁷

Eastward lay Semlin manor-farm, with arable unshared with other cultivators and new dairy and sheep farms. In 1810 its cropland

⁴¹ No. 259, pt. XIV; no. 705, fo. 128. ⁴² No. 43, fo. 77. ⁴³ No. 705, fo. 128.

⁴⁴ No. 43, fo. 38. ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, fo. 40. ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*; no. 258, fos. 7–10; cf. table 10.3, below.

⁴⁷ No. 43, fos. 42, 77.

spanned 322 hectares. Here was an outbuilding, inhabited by a shepherd and his wife, alongside a large but ruined house and a tile-roofed, two-storied “summer building,” seemingly for workers tending the 90 cattle and 1,500 sheep earlier kept here. Nearby was one of the lordship’s numerous fishponds, capitalized at 150 gulden because of its pike, carp, and humbler species.⁴⁸ The arable, “good and loamy,” could bear annual sowings of 32 tons of rye, barley, and oats, together with fallow-planted buckwheat and peas. But after the war sowings fell by half. Of labor services Lindt wrote that “earlier, because of the many subject farmers, only one [manorial] horse-team for hauling manure and harrowing needed to be kept.” Here too was forage for 240 pigs, at a seasonal charge per head to Stavenow subjects of 18 groschen, and to “outsiders” of 1 taler.⁴⁹

Stavenow’s third demesne farm was a small “knightly manor” (*Rittersitz*) in nearby Premslin village. One of the Quitzows had always lived here, including most recently Cuno, “until the end of his days.” The house, surrounded by a drawbridged moat, had been of stone and wood, with a tile roof, but now lay burnt and ruined. Its dairy-farm, with good pasturage and meadows, had kept 100 head. Still standing was “the building where the dairy-mistress lived with maids and other servants,” though tiled stove and windows were missing.⁵⁰ The seigneurial arable (1810: 166 hectares), though not intermixed with Premslin villagers’ lands, followed the same three-field rotations and usages governing them. Fallowing “fattened” the land so that it could bear summer peas before fall rye sowing.⁵¹ Manorial grain plantings, once 23 tons, were now, on the overgrown fields, “tiny.” Lindt observed that “the estate has its labor nearby in the village . . . namely nineteen fullholders and one smallholder, who easily carried out the cultivation here.” There were five usable manorial fishponds. As for grazing seigneurial sheep on village land, “the villagers did not want to allow a herd here, but now that most of the farms are deserted, they cannot stop the lordship.”⁵²

Such were Stavenow’s principal directly owned assets. There was also, until Blumenthal sold it, a town house in nearby Perleberg that Lütke von Quitzow bought in 1556. Still in fair condition, it was wooden, with a slate roof and in the garden a “fine walled tower,” three stories high, which Lütke called “*Balchfriede*” (roughly: “retreat from life’s turmoil”). Though a nobleman, Lütke acquired with this residence all the

⁴⁸ No. 32, fo. 34; no. 131. ⁴⁹ No. 43, fo. 45; no. 131; no. 705, fo. 22. ⁵⁰ No. 32, fo. 28.

⁵¹ No. 131. ⁵² No. 705, fo. 22. No. 43, fos. 55, 60.

usual burgher's rights, including freedom to pursue a trade and brew beer. Probably, like his Quitzow and Blumenthal successors, he rented hunting rights on the town's broad farmland and heath.⁵³ The Junkers' rise usually figures as the burghers' loss, but these small details suggest a coexistence of east-Elbian landed gentry and townspeople that, in English history, was entirely normal.

The long sixteenth century brought an agriculturally led economic growth to Brandenburg and its neighbors that benefited successful and fortunate burghers (and village farmers) alongside Junkers. This point vanishes in a literature stressing Malthusian demographic imbalances of population and food-supply in sixteenth-century Europe and spiraling indebtedness among high-spending nobility and rulers. Yet the Quitzows' fashioning of the Stavenow estates into a valuable and productive large-scale enterprise shows that the Junkers' rise represented vigorous economic growth: 83 and more tons of annual sowings were a mini-mountain. Based on long-understood technology and much uncooperative labor, commercialized manorialism represented extensive rather than efficiency-gaining intensive growth. Yet at the macrolevel it was a multiplier of domestic wealth. But what price did the village farmers and laborers pay who made such Junkers as the Quitzows rich?⁵⁴

STAVENOW'S SUBJECT VILLAGES

The 1601 appraisal assigned nearly one-third of the lordship's value to levies on villagers. But their economic value stood even higher, for without their unpaid (or ill-paid) labor, the seigneurial arable could only have been farmed at a heavy cost in wages and fixed capital. Sustaining the subject farmers in their service to the manor-hall were their own old-established farms. As elsewhere in east-Elbian Germany, the Stavenow villagers' holdings were measured in *Hufen*, a concept recalling the old English "hide of land." During medieval colonization, village settlements were laid out, or arose anew on earlier Slavic foundations, endowed with extensive fields of arable and pasturable land (*Feldmarken*), along with meadows and woods. The *Hufe* encompassed

⁵³ No. 43, fo. 82; no. 131.

⁵⁴ Cf. Eric L. Jones, *Growth Recurring. Economic Change in World History* (Oxford, 1988); Hagen, "Crisis," "Capitalism," "*Sonderweg*," and "Village Life"; reappraisals by east European historians of commercialized manorialism in east-central and Balkan Europe in Daniel Chirot, ed., *The Origins of Economic Backwardness in Eastern Europe. Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, 1989).

shares of these communal lands large enough to support a household, including elders and a servant or two. The farmstead's buildings, gardens, and orchards sat alongside its neighbors, near its hereditary plots in the open fields. Such fields were, usually, three in number, although often villages possessed additional, infertile lands, sown only every few years, and otherwise used as pasturage.

For reasons obscure – perhaps related to colonists' origins in the fertile Low Countries and western Germany – the *Hufe* proved too small, on the often sandy eastern soils, to support a family farm. Nearly everywhere, village holdings came to encompass larger areas: two *Hufen*, as at Stavenow, or more. Such fullholdings (*Vollbauern-* or *Hüfnerhöfe*) were typical, though villages also counted some smallholdings (*Kössätenhöfe*). Though named after cottagers, these usually comprised arable land, sometimes equal to half a fullholding, in separate sections of the communal fields. In the sixteenth century, and after 1648, some fragmentation of village land occurred, especially division of fullholdings into halfholdings. At the village margin, dwarf cottage holdings appeared, with a house and garden and, at most, patches of arable. But while farm shrinkage was pervasive in early modern western and southern Europe, and in Poland, Bohemia, Saxony and Silesia, it was rarer in Brandenburg-Prussia, perhaps because population was thinner. Preservation of the larger farms, able to render labor services with horses, also reflected the interest both of gentry and government, with its numerous princely manor-farms.⁵⁵

As on seigneurial land, the measure of village farmers' arable was the quantity of sowable seed. Because areal surveying only triumphed after 1700, the *Hufe*'s precise surface equivalents in earlier times are usually unknown. In eighteenth-century Brandenburg, it comprised 30 "large" or "Prussian" *Morgen* (as opposed to the smaller "Magdeburg *Morgen*" predominant in the nineteenth century). This term ("morning") originally referred to the land a plowman could cover in half a day. Two "large" *Hufen* encompassed 85.5 English acres (34 hectares), one-third of which lay fallow (leaving 57 acres [23 hectares] for yearly planting). A fullholder also possessed shares of the village's woods and meadows. Custom said that, on average land, 1 bushel was sowable on 1 *Morgen* (and hence 40 bushels annually on 2 standard *Hufen*). An eighteenth-century Stavenow fullholding sowed 48 bushels: 24 of rye and 12 each of barley and oats.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ On European trends: Scott, *Peasantries*. ⁵⁶ Müller, *Landwirtschaft*, 16ff, 102ff, 142ff, 203.