
Francia. Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte

Herausgegeben vom Deutschen Historischen Institut Paris

(Institut historique allemand)

Band 7 (1979)

DOI: 10.11588/fr.1979.0.49401

Rechtshinweis

Bitte beachten Sie, dass das Digitalisat urheberrechtlich geschützt ist. Erlaubt ist aber das Lesen, das Ausdrucken des Textes, das Herunterladen, das Speichern der Daten auf einem eigenen Datenträger soweit die vorgenannten Handlungen ausschließlich zu privaten und nicht-kommerziellen Zwecken erfolgen. Eine darüber hinausgehende unerlaubte Verwendung, Reproduktion oder Weitergabe einzelner Inhalte oder Bilder können sowohl zivil- als auch strafrechtlich verfolgt werden.

Stefi JERSCH-WENZEL, *Juden und ›Franzosen‹ in der Wirtschaft des Raums Berlin-Brandenburg zur Zeit des Merkantilismus*. Mit einem Geleitwort von Otto BÜSCH, Berlin (Colloquium Verlag) 1978, XIV–290 p. (Einzerveröffentlichungen der Historischen Kommission zu Berlin, 23).

The great importance of the immigrants for the growth of agriculture, trade and industry in Brandenburg-Prussia has been recognized for a long time and has been the subject of a voluminous literature. Yet, at it seems, no one has tried to compare the two principal groups concerned, the Jews and the Huguenots, and to assess their relative importance for the development of their new home. Indeed, in the absence of statistics this is an almost impossible task, but it is the undoubted merit of this monograph that its author asks the right questions and at least attempts to answer them. As might be expected, there were similarities and dissimilarities in the treatment of the immigrant communities by the Prussian government as well as in their behaviour and in their economic activities. While the Huguenots were welcomed with open arms and were granted a number of important privileges which greatly benefited their colony, the Jews were admitted very tardily, were looked at with strong suspicion and very heavily taxed; not only did they have to pay heavily for the permission to settle and to stay in Prussia, but Jewish traders had to give double the amount of excise paid by the Christian competitors. The number of Jews admitted remained very small: the author estimates that around 1700 only about 2500 Jews lived in Brandenburg. The number of Huguenots who settled there, on the other hand, reached about 9–10,000; in 1699 as many as 5,682 of them lived in Berlin alone, and at least another 3,000 in the rest of the Mark. They were freed from onerous taxation for many years and – in contrast with the Jews – admitted to the guilds; they were very welcome, while the Jews were not. It has to be borne in mind, however, that the Great Elector and his successor in readmitting the Jews to Brandenburg had to overcome considerable opposition from the urban authorities and above all from the Estates: a difficulty which is not really taken into account in this study.

As to the economic activities of the immigrants, Dr. Jersch-Wenzel repeatedly emphasizes that the Jews as well as the Huguenots were able to use their own coreligionists in other towns and foreign countries as their commercial links and as sources of commercial and industrial know-how – an advantage they enjoyed over their German competitors; that the Jews, on the other hand, brought in more capital than the Huguenots and tended to marry within the narrow circle of wealthy Jewish families so as to increase their working capital, while the Huguenots assimilated considerably more quickly and intermarried not only among themselves but also with the natives and with Catholic Frenchmen. She compares this attitude of the wealthy Jews to marriage with that of the noble families: the same was true of many German and non-German princes who in this way established hereditary claims to foreign territories, often with singular success. Jews as well as Huguenots concentrated their industrial activities principally on the needs of the Prussian army and on the much favoured luxury industries, especially the silk and velvet industry. The industrial enterprises of Jewish entrepreneurs often were on a larger scale than

those of the Huguenots, many of whom employed only a few workmen and were hardly more than master craftsmen – perhaps owing to the lack of sufficient capital. In general, the lack of capital accumulation seems to have been one of the principal obstacles to the growth of industry in Prussia, or as Dr. Jersch-Wenzel puts it in a rather complicated way: »Zusammenfassend bleibt festzustellen, daß . . . bei den ›Franzosen‹ wie bei den Juden größere Vermögen, die zur Investition in Handel und Gewerbe genutzt werden konnten, nur dort entstanden, wo die Möglichkeit der Akkumulation in Geld- und Warenhandel vorhanden war« (p. 177–78). Accumulation seems to stem from capital accumulation, quod erat demonstrandum.

Yet there were other grave obstacles to the industrial development of Prussia which should have been discussed. There was, above all, the enormous cost of war and the army. While it remains true, as she thinks, that the needs of the army provided a stimulus to industrial growth, it is equally true that more than two thirds of all state revenue were spent on the army: such sums, if invested in industry or agriculture, might have produced far more beneficial results, as was proved by the Electorate of Saxony at that time. There was further the continuing existence of serfdom which kept the majority of the population desperately poor, severely reduced internal demand and slowed the growth of the internal market. The author several times mentions »die innovationsfeindliche Einstellung der Gesamtgesellschaft«, but this was only one among several factors and it applied also elsewhere in Germany. Some of her arithmetic is even more doubtful. She states, for example, that 74 Jewish families in 1700 lived in Frankfurt an der Oder and estimates that they comprised about ten per cent of the town's population (p. 61); but if the town, as she says, then had more than 8,000 inhabitants this would mean that every Jewish family had as many as eleven members which seems very unlikely. Elsewhere she estimates that around 1700 about 2500 Jews lived in Brandenburg and continues: »Davon entfielen etwa je 100 auf die Neumark und auf die Mittel- und Uckermark und einige hundert auf die Kurmark« (p. 64). If the Kurmark comprised the Altmark and the Priegnitz, we are again left with an arithmetical puzzle, for these figures if added account for only 7 or 800 out of 2500, and where did the others live? perhaps in Berlin? But Berlin was part of the Mittelmark, and elsewhere it is stated that the capital only contained 117 Jewish families at that time, so that each of them must have counted at least fourteen members! Things get worse when it comes to English history. It is not only bad German but also quite incorrect that there existed in England »der auf nationaler Grundlage zu einem einheitlichen Wirtschaftsgebiet zentralisierte Staat« (p. 117), or that in England – as in France – »gleichzeitig mit dem Übergang zum Absolutismus der ›Reichtum der Nation‹ zum obersten Ziel erklärt wurde« (p. 116): when and by whom? In England there was hardly any state control of the economy; quite apart from the fact that »der Übergang zum Absolutismus« never took place but was forestalled in the course of the 16th century. It is a great pity that a book which contains much interesting material and many interesting suggestions should be marred by such elementary errors.

F. L. CARSTEN, London