

# Franz von Sickingen

## Franz von Sickingen (1481-1523): Professional Feuding

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(Translated by Christopher Schönberger, Austrian Armed Forces Language Institute)

The transitional period between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period is generally associated with numerous important events and social changes. As examples could serve the discovery of America by Columbus in 1492 and the conquest of Granada that same year. The end of the Eastern Roman Empire in 1495 marked another watershed as did the Reformation (with Luther allegedly posting his theses in 1517) and the 1524-1526 Peasants' War.

If this sea change is made the frame of reference, the concomitant shifts in the social structure of the German Reich are often given scant attention. These include the boom of the large German trading towns, the rural exodus from many territories, the increasing power of the territorial nobility, noticeable since the High Middle Ages, as well as the gentry's loss of power, apparent since the Late Middle Ages. The following will deal with the life of Franz von Sickingen (the last knight), who, in many ways, was an anomaly in that time of crisis.

When Franz von Sickingen was born not far from Bad Kreuznach, in Castle Ebern, on 1 March 1481, the knights' heyday was over. There were manifold reasons for the decline of the warrior caste, which still had been indispensable in the High Middle Ages. The emperors' power had been on the decline since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and the importance of the territorial nobility had been on the increase. Sometime later, towns and cities began to flourish both economically and politically. Long-distance trading made not only Cologne, Strasburg, Nuremberg, Augsburg, and the members of the Hanseatic League rich, but also centres of textile production such as Isny, Kempten, Leutkirch or Ravensburg. The Fuggers and Welsers forged their economic empires. The merchants made exorbitant profits from trading in precious textiles, jewellery, and spices from Africa or Asia. This new supply also created demand among the landed gentry. Domestic produce from fields, meadows, forests and ponds was no longer good enough. So that they could also enjoy the treasures from far-away countries, the gentry in the Late Middle Ages increasingly shifted their tax demands from payments in kind to taxes payable in money. In the last decades of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, however, food prices increased sharply following a series of bad harvests, and, at the same time, money lost its value. This was when the gentry tried to reverse developments and again demanded payments in kind from their subjects, which was generally met with fierce resistance by the starving population.

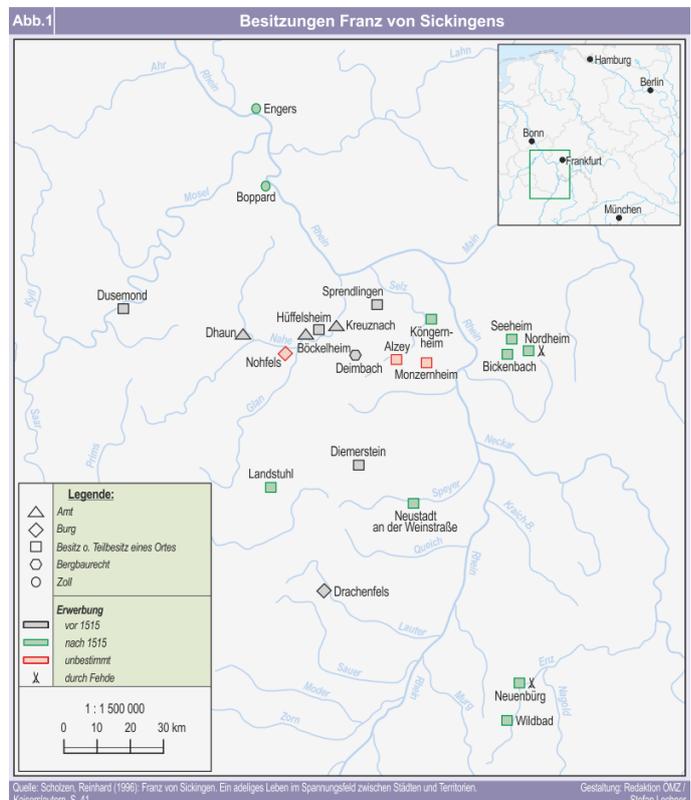
For the majority of the knights, the end of the Middle Ages not only meant economic losses, but also changes to their social position. Lansquenet armies, artillery, and the attendant changes to the way wars were waged made knights increasingly superfluous. Furthermore, when looking to fill executive positions, towns and territories were beginning to look more for university graduates. Especially the gentry of that time rarely gave education any priority. All this forced knights to reorient themselves, which led to a crisis of identity for many, which meant that a large number failed in their attempt to find their place in society.

The Sickingen family was an exception in this difficult environment. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the dynasty, which originally hailed from the Kraichgau, enjoyed an economic boom.[1] Schweikard VIII, the father of Franz von Sickingen, enlarged the property, but also sold assets if they proved unprofitable; furthermore, he married into money. All this made it possible for him to grant the Elector Palatine loans of, in total, 24,300 guilders.[2] Count Palatine Johann von Simmern had also borrowed money from Schweikard von Sickingen. In return for outstanding debts, the two princes gave him Castle Ebern in 1482, which he had only partly owned until then.[3]

In his economic activities Schweikard also focused on a field which, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, was experiencing huge growth in the Pfalz, too: in a number of pits, *inter alia* close to Castle Ebern, he was mining for copper, mercury, and silver. As he could not raise the necessary investment alone, he cooperated with the brothers Rhemfried, as well as Friedrich von Rüdeseheim and Friedrich von Dhaun. Within a few years the owners invested 10,000 guilders in an ore mine.[4] Further sources show that financial worries did not bother Schweikard. Spending and revenues were both considerable: during the 1499 Frankfurt autumn exhibition he bought products for more than 182 guilders[5] and at the same time enjoyed considerable revenues from his allodial land (i.e. his property) around Landstuhl.[6]

Little is known of his son Franz's childhood and youth. For a long time, the written records do not mention him. In 1495 he accompanied his father to the Diet of Worms, and married Hedwig von Flersheim in 1498 or 1499.

Historical sources provide only slightly more information following the death of his father in 1505. Franz immediately continued his enterprises. He, however, also relied on a close network with the strong political forces in the region; as Electorate Palatine Bailiff in Kreuznach he received a regular income. He also made efforts to cultivate good relations with the Elector Jakob von Baden in Trier, who awarded him Castle Hunolstein as a fief in 1506, which meant regular tributes from Breit on the Mosel. In 1509 Bishop Wilhelm of Strasburg also bestowed a number of fiefs on him, and that same year, Sickingen entered into a mercenary contract with the Elector of Mainz. This meant that he had to provide Bishop Uriel with a force of six horsemen against an annual payment of 150 guilders.[7]



Details of young Franz's financial possibilities can be gleaned from the distribution of the estate following his mother's death in 1507. After he had already paid out his siblings following the father's death, another princely sum became due. In sum, he paid his siblings a minimum of 6,000 guilders in the space of two years, which, however, did not noticeably impede his urge to increase his property. In Norheim, not far from Ebern Castle, he bought shares in a quarry in 1508.[8] two years later he purchased a farm for 100 guilders from Hans Koch, a citizen of Kreuznach,[9] and a little later he acquired further properties in Alsace.[10]

Further proof of Franz von Sickingen's rude financial health can be found in a tailor's bill from the years between 1505 and 1512. Master Jacob Wolff of Heidelberg produced a number of garments for him, *inter alia* a coat made of five and a half cubits of black linen, for which the tailor demanded five guilders and two pennies. Over the years, the total amount came to more than 150 guilders.[11] Sickingen only grudgingly paid his tailor, proof of generally poor paying habits at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. That he was not troubled by financial worries is shown by the loans which he granted the Elector at the same time. As a trade-off, the latter relieved Sickingen's ore mines at the Rheingrafenstein of all tributes in 1511, and also awarded him the right to mine for mercury near Deimbach.

In the autumn of 1514 the Pfalz also experienced a crisis created by the oversupply of metals. Sickingen's mine at the Rheingrafenstein no longer delivered the required returns, which is why he sold it on 3 November 1514 for 3,200 guilders.[12] It stands to reason that this was a result of the overproduction and falling metal prices (especially copper). At that time, first consequences of the metal imports from South America became apparent, which, *inter alia*, led to silver mining being stopped in the Tyrol. There are some indications, however, that the metal crisis was not the only reason for Franz von Sickingen to sell his mine. At this point, a look back would appear to be helpful.

In 1495, the Diet of Worms passed the *Ewiger Landfriede (Perpetual Peace)*, the essence of which was a general ban on feuds. During the Middle Ages, feuds played an extremely important role as a legal remedy. Otto Brunner elaborates this impressively in his extraordinary *Land and Lordship* [13], by clearly differentiating between feud and the rule of force. Brunner may forego a definition of the term, he, however, makes a clear distinction between a legitimate and an illegitimate feud. Without going into detail, Bockmann's description is can be followed: " *The legitimate feud required a generally accepted reason. This could, for example, be a rejected lawsuit. Whoever thought that justice had not been done could resort to the feud.*"[14] No good answer has been found as to who was actually allowed to conduct a legitimate feud. To regard this as the right of the *knighthly man* is not satisfactory, as the knights elude a clear definition. The answer to this differed from territory to territory, and underwent numerous changes throughout the Middle Ages.[15] What is largely beyond dispute is the ritualised conduct of a legitimate feud. It began with the feud letter, and the manner in which it was delivered was already laid down in detail. In the same way, the amount of time between delivery and the beginning of hostilities was prescribed. The three-day period was often circumvented, however. The end to the feud was also largely standardised.[16]

After 1495 it was no longer permissible personally to pursue legitimate or pretended claims by whatever means of violence. The decision of the Diet, however, lacked an effective executive which could guarantee that the rules and prohibitions were adhered to. This is why the number of feuds did not in any way go down after 1495. The gentry of South and Southwest Germany became infamous when feuds as a subsidiary legal remedy mutated into a lucrative business model for many a knight. One stood up for the rights of others in exchange for money: the Absberg family was feuding just as actively as *Messrs* von Rosenberg or Götz von Berlichingen were. Konrad von Boyneburg, Schertlin von Burtenbach, and Georg von Fundsberg perfected feuding and, within a few years, rose to become independently operating entrepreneurs of war.

Schweikard von Sickingen also gained feuding experience. For approximately ten years he was at loggerheads with Cologne. The reason given was that he had been arrested in Cologne, armed with a dagger, although carrying arms within city walls had been outlawed by the city council. The real reason, however, was not this statutory violation and the knight's piqued honour, but a real legal dispute, going back to Schweikard's father:[17] in 1475 Reinhard von Sickingen had made a claim for 3,000 guilders against Count Philipp von Virneburg in Rottweil manorial court. The court concurred with Reinhard and sentenced the Count to settle the debt. When Philipp von Virneburg was imprisoned in Cologne, Sickingen must have been celebrating expectantly, albeit too early; Cologne released him after a short time, without Reinhard's claim having been settled. Another incident could also have been the reason for Schweikard's feud with Cologne: during the disturbances of 1481 the city constables impounded the assets of goldsmith Heinrich Dringenberg. He approached Schweikard von Sickingen and asked the knight to demand their release from the aldermen.

Schweikard aggressively moved against the people of Cologne numerous times; *inter alia*, he confiscated the wares of two boilermakers at Bacharach Customs. Although the aldermen were pushing for a quick resolution, it took until 1498 until those involved could put the past behind them; nothing is known about the modalities of the settlement.

Much more is known about Franz von Sickingen's first feud. It was triggered by a dispute between the citizens of the imperial city of Worms and their bishop. One of the claimants was the Episcopalian Notary Balthasar Schlör. He had made numerous attempts to recover his property through recourse to the courts. After all attempts had been to no avail, he approached Franz von Sickingen, so that he could regain possession of his property.

On 1 November 1514 - two days before the final deed of sale for the Rheingrafenstein mine was completed - Sickingen sent a letter to Worms city council in which he demanded that the Worms citizen Nicolas Knobellach repay Balthasar Schlör the 150 guilders which the former had borrowed. In addition, the knight threatened that he would be forced to find alternative ways of recovering the money, should the council not come to a quick solution. He also added the veiled threat that all he was interested in was good relations with the community.[18]

The bad weather may have given the people of Worms a short respite, but on the first day of spring Sickingen seized a merchant vessel from Worms on its way to the Frankfurt spring exhibition. The knight had painstakingly prepared for this raid: he had mobilised a great force, obtained ships, reconnoitred the ship's arrival time, armament and cargo, selected a suitable place for the holdup, as well as planned how to deal with the merchants and the wares seized.

Despite the intensive planning, a mishap occurred during the operation. Among the goods commandeered were spices belonging to the grand Strasbourg citizen Friedrich von Gottesheim, who immediately complained to the council of his hometown about the loss incurred. Sickingen promptly wrote to the Strasbourg councillors and assured them that the goods had been confiscated through an oversight. He also informed them that he had already paid Friedrich 25 guilders in compensation.[19] The knight closed the letter with the pleasantries common at the time, but these should not be dismissed as mere rhetoric: Sickingen strove for good relations with the trading centre on the Upper Rhine.

Events took their course. On 25 March, Sickingen's feud letter arrived in Worms. On 16 April Emperor Maximilian placed the ructious knight under the imperial ban. Not quite one month later (15 May) the Emperor renewed the ban. Although this meant that any form of support for the knight was forbidden and carried a penalty of 1,000 marks, his peers willingly supported him. In his autobiography, Götz von Berlichingen proudly describes the help provided to Sickingen: he himself, Hans Thomas von Rosenberg and a number of other knights provided Franz von Sickingen with 70 or 80 horses for his feud. Berlichingen also describes the *do ut des among knights*. Franz had wanted to pay for the horses immediately, the *Knight of the iron hand* reported, but his supporters had refused. Instead they emphasised that if they were in a similar situation, their good friend Franz would help them equally readily.[20] If the average monthly costs of a horseman are calculated to be ten guilders, this act of friendship would amount to 700 to 800 guilders. But neither his peers' active support, nor a marked intensification of the feud against the imperial city brought the desired success. The people of Worms did not give up, because they were hoping for powerful allies.

Whilst an end to the feud with Worms was still not foreseeable, Sickingen delivered an impressive example of his power. He represented the interests of Gangolf of Geroldseck, who asserted a claim to one of Duke Anton von Lothringen's silver mines. This way, Sickingen stepped onto the European political stage, where the different interests produced new coalitions. Not only the English King Henry VIII, but also Emperor Maximilian sometimes provided money for Sickingen's campaign, as they wanted to drive the Lorrainer, who had already made approaches to France, back into the arms of the *Reich*. In June 1516, Sickingen's troops cut across the duchy, wrought devastation; however, again failed there to produce an outright success. When, subsequently, the French King increased his help for beleaguered Duke Anton, England and Germany stopped their support. Sickingen reacted to the evaporating cash flow and quickly came to an agreement with the Lorrainer which he could still pass off as a success: apart from recovering his costs, he persuaded Duke Anton to enter into a mercenary contract. In return for an annual pension, the Palatinate knight was to grant military support at any time.[21]

It was in spring 1516 that the knight began pursuing independent power politics, excellently described by his biographer Ulman: "*From then on, his ties to Lorraine pulled him even more into the circle of small dynasties which knew how to use deft see-saw policies between the two empires to ensure their survival, as well as to increase their importance and power. His name began to be a factor to be reckoned with.*"[22] Against this backdrop it was a matter of logic that Sickingen changed coalitions in autumn 1516 by entering into a mercenary contract with the French King Francis I. Little is known of the contractual obligations; it is said that he was paid 2,000 Francs a year. The historian of the *Flersheimer Chronik*, however, states laconically that the King had "*accepted [Sickingen] as a servant, promised much and honoured little.*"[23]

However, it was not only Sickingen who reacted to the changes in European power relations: the peace accord which France and the *Reich* signed in Brussels on 3 December 1516 gave Emperor Maximilian greater political leeway, which he immediately used to support the city of Worms in its fight with Sickingen. On 6 December the Emperor wrote to the imperial estates and called on them to provide forces for a campaign against Sickingen by 12 March 1517.[24]

In the *Reich* itself, the Emperor's ambitious initiative was met with little support; it was especially the towns, when asked for assistance, which whined with one voice about their coffers being empty. Heilbronn and Wimpfen hid behind an alleged formal error, as they had been mistakenly contacted as members of the Franconian Circle, although, in their opinion, they could only be approached as members of the Swabian League. The League, and not them, would have to decide whether help against Sickingen was to be provided. The League members were not enamoured of the imperial initiative against Sickingen and decided in their resolution of 1 February 1517 that aid would be withheld unless the electors, princes, and other imperial estates decided on a campaign against Sickingen.[25]

While the imperial estates were still discussing the importance of assistance, and finding new arguments against such a move on an almost daily basis, the knight took action. On 25 March he pillaged a goods convoy of south German traders on its way to the Frankfurt spring exhibition. The Nuremberg Council immediately turned to Ulrich Artzt, one of the three Captains of the Swabian League[26], and urgently requested help for their merchants who had suffered serious harm. Artzt contacted the other cities affected and set 10 May as the date for the next meeting of the Swabian League, exclusively to discuss the Sickingen problem.[27]

For large cities, merchants being robbed was routine, which is why they had developed mechanisms so as to, at any rate, limit the damage. Smaller cities, however, had no experience of such events and were therefore almost helpless, which is why the Isny councillors had to enlist the help of their colleagues in Memmingen. Its town chronicler had the necessary know-how and, against the payment of a munificent allowance, represented the interests of the Isny merchants.[28]

The claimants were clamouring for a quick decision and were zealously searching for the guilty party. After initial consultations they even accused the lodesman, the Elector Palatinate. Some representatives even considered military action against the Electoral Palatinate.[29]

The raid on the south German merchants led to a reassessment. In May 1517, voices arguing for a punitive expedition against the knight became louder in the *Reich*.[30] Sickingen, however, was unfazed by the increasing agitation in territories and towns and, on 23 May, raided the herds of cattle in Landau and its environs.[31] In the towns of the Alsace these raids increased the fear of Sickingen. Especially Strasburg, which Sickingen always had good relations with, hesitated to deploy troops against the Palatinate knight – as likely as not because it balked at the high cost. Despite this, and against resistance and concerns, in the middle of June 1517 the Alsace contingents were likewise set in motion against Sickingen, with Worms being the objective. On 7 July the Strasburg detachment commanded by Glad Böckling von Böcklinsau arrived in Speyer, where command was transferred to the imperial captains. In the middle of June the first Alsace troops reached Worms.

Not only the towns of the Alsace faced financial problems. On 13 June, Memmingen and Kempten had despatched their contingents - one horseman and 34 foot soldiers apiece - to Worms. On 8 July the Memmingen commanders wrote to their councillors that they had shown good will, had marched to the holding area in Wimpfen without pay; now, however, they urgently required money, as the month they had been paid for was drawing to a close. Even the extreme frugality they had exercised in Wimpfen would not make a further stay possible as "*chow was very expensive everywhere*"[32]. The Memmingen footsoldiers had to write more than one letter and wait a long time until they received some guilders from home. They were not alone with their financial problems, as voices were raised everywhere, demanding a withdrawal of troops.[33]

When July had passed without military action being taken against Sickingen, the larger towns also ran out of patience. Despite this, Ulrich Artzt was doing his best to win the members of the Swabian League for a continuation of the campaign; new rumours, however, appeared which put the whole venture into doubt: on 17 August, the Ulm aldermen notified their Strasburg colleagues that Emperor Maximilian and Franz von Sickingen had come to an agreement.[34] Something similar was reported by the Strasburg commander Glad Böcklin. A few days later conjecture became fact, and finally, on 23 August, the towns of the Swabian League were given permission to recall their troops.[35] A short time later the Alsace contingents were also withdrawn from Worms.

The most important reason for the Emperor's change of mind was repeatedly raised by Sickingen in the negotiations that had been going on since July: he was the only person who could rein in obstreperous Duke Ulrich von Württemberg. The Emperor could not and would not ignore this argument and, on 17 July, lifted the imperial ban. As a token of his gratitude, Sickingen again stressed his allegiance to the Emperor in a letter of 16 August 1517 and affirmed that "*he would serve and help against Duke Ulrich von Württemberg as well as his allies and supporters.*"[36]

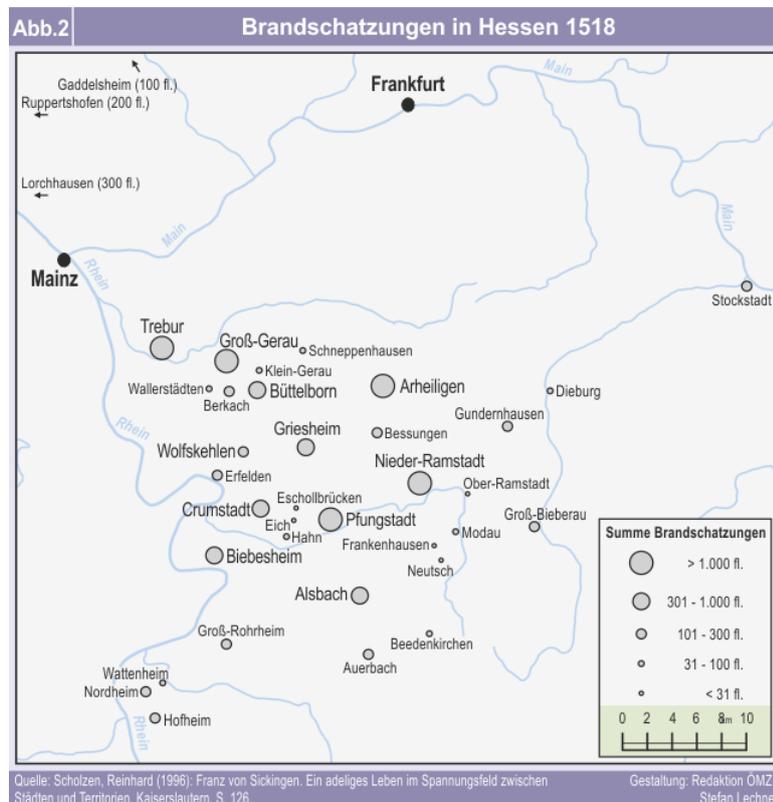
Thus, the people of Worms experienced their interests being sacrificed on the altar of *Reich* politics. To add insult to injury, they were also saddled with the huge costs - 86,000 guilders[37], as calculated by their town chronicler[38].

The accommodation with the Emperor, however, encouraged Franz von Sickingen to start new feuds. In the summer of 1518 he began a campaign against Metz, which netted him 25,000 guilders. He then turned against the Hessian landgrave. Whereas the campaigns against Worms or the Duke of Lorraine had been protracted affairs, he now aimed for quick results by means of extensive pillaging. With small units he roamed the southern part of the landgraviate and within the space of only a few days presented forty small towns with the stark choice of either paying ransom or watching their houses go up in flames. The amounts extorted varied considerably: whereas the small parish of Escholbrücken near Darmstadt had to pay 20 guilders, the adjacent monastery of Arheiligen had to cough up 2,000 guilders. The pillaging netted a total profit of 14,842 guilders.[39] In addition, on 23 September, the landgrave had to pledge to pay Sickingen a further 35,000 guilders in the treaty of Darmstadt.[40]

Immediately after the feud with Hesse, Sickingen turned against the imperial city of Frankfurt. The councillors accepted a peace settlement and paid 4,000 guilders, thereby saving the city from total calamity. In total, the feuds of 1518 made Sickingen 83,896 guilders.

Events after the death of Maximilian II on 12 January 1519 were evidence of Sickingen's powerful position. Three candidates were battling for the German crown: the Emperor's grandson, Charles of Spain, the French, and the English King. The island king soon retracted his candidacy, which is why Francis of France and Charles of Spain used all the means at their disposal to win the electors' favour. This required either powerful supporters or removing instruments of power from the competitor's grasp. The French negotiators therefore attempted to move Franz von Sickingen to ditch his connections to Hapsburg. The messengers did not skimp on financial promises, however, also directed his attention to the, alleged, irresistible pro-French coalition in the Reich. Hapsburg diplomacy was also active. Maragareta, governor general of the Netherlands and daughter of Emperor Maximilian, also recognised Sickingen's key position and urged her confidants to keep the knight in the Hapsburg camp. Especially the electors from the Rhine were very interested in a strong partner who could repel a possible military intervention by France. His military power and advantageous strategic position in the Palatinate made Franz von Sickingen an excellent protective buffer between France and the Electorates of Cologne, Mainz, Trier and the Palatinate; the knight thus became a key figure in the struggle for power between Hapsburg and Valois.

After Sickingen had decided for the Hapsburg side at the beginning of March 1519, he carried through on the promise he had made to Emperor Maximilian and prepared for a campaign against Duke Ulrich von Württemberg, who had exploited the confusion following the Emperor's death and had seized the imperial city of Reutlingen. Sickingen, on a mission of the *Reich*, assumed that helping hands would be extended to him from all sides, especially from the imperial cities; self-assured, he wrote to Frankfurt on 13 March and informed the council that he intended to pass through the city on the Main with his army, and, if necessary, to spend the night. The councillors, however, refused the army access, a decision for which they had a number of reasons. On the one hand, they all too well remembered the feud Sickingen had executed against them only a few months previously; on the other hand, the council had intimations that there were plans for new feuds against the city. Only after the Swabian League had put pressure on Frankfurt to let Sickingen's army into the city, did the councillors relent and suggest, as a compromise, to grant access to 200 horsemen; the rest would have to remain outside the city walls. This could not be satisfactory to the commander, as it would undoubtedly have produced resentment among his troops. He again tried to quarter his 600 horsemen in Frankfurt; the councillors, however, were only willing to take 300.



This development highly displeased Sickingen and the Swabian League. In order to pour oil on troubled waters, Frankfurt provided written arguments for its decision a couple of days later. They could not let Sickingen's troops into their city as they feared that they lacked the necessary capacities to provide lodgings and were wondering whether the two armies would get along.[41] This argument, however, did not assuage Sickingen, which is why he claimed in the following days that the imperial city supported the French King. The Hapsburg advisers, however, did not fall for this rumour and the *Reich's* Vice Chancellor Nikolaus Ziegler informed the Frankfurt council that he could not censure their actions, because other cities had behaved similarly; Nördlingen, for example, had refused access to the Margrave of Brandenburg.[42]

These power struggles did not influence the campaign against Duke Ulrich von Württemberg, who had little to counter the Swabian League. This is why the League's commander could dismiss some of the mercenaries early, before the military action had been brought to an end, and Duke Ulrich had to flee the country.

Hapsburg did not want to lose Sickingen's services: together with Georg von Frundsberg he was ready to protect the location of the royal election. The preparations which were taken officially to defend against a possible military strike by France did not, however, meet with universal approval in the Reich; in a letter dated 25 June 1519 the Saxon delegate Eberhard Senfft openly turned against such intimidation. He feared a military attack, should the

electors decide against the Hapsburg.[43]

Despite a number of concerns, the massed troops played a minor role in the electoral decision. Far more important were the munificent payments the Hapsburg negotiators awarded the election body of seven. Hapsburg's power relied for a large part on these lavish subsidies, which the future Emperor Charles received from the richest man at that time, Jakob Fugger from Augsburg. Sickingen also made a tidy profit from the intervention on Hapsburg's side: in the expenses register for the election of Charles to German King, there is one payment to Sickingen of 38,717 guilders.[44]

After that, the Palatine knight disappears for about a year from the records. From summer 1519 to autumn 1520 he worked as recruiter for the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, ended a lawsuit with the Archbishop of Cologne, and had an illness treated with the South American *Lignum Guaiaci*. Whether this was gout or syphilis cannot be said, as the wood from South America was used to treat both illnesses.

In the autumn of 1520 Sickingen again appeared on the international stage, by loaning 20,000 guilders to Charles V without demanding any collateral. The possible reasons for this liberal allowance are still discussed by historians. Günther Franz regarded it as a "*splendid gesture based in chivalry*"[45], Heinrich Ulmann regarded it as a special honour that Sickingen was allowed to grant the emperor this loan, it was furthermore "*proof of the importance awarded him, and possibly also of the great plans for him*".[46] These explanations are not convincing, as Sickingen had not proved himself especially loyal to the emperor since the beginning of the feud against Worms. In the years following 1515 he had shown a keen sense for shifting power dynamics and a permanent disposition towards changing alliances. He bought the lifting of the imperial ban with the promise to go to war against Ulrich von Württemberg; he then used the rapport with the emperor to carry out a series of feuds. Against this backdrop, there is little that speaks for altruistic goals in his loan to Charles V. He possibly wanted to ensure the continuation of good relations with the House of Hapsburg, in order to be unencumbered in his ventures.

The *Reich*, financially ruined, was grateful for any payments, also those of the Welser and the Fugger, and granted the creditors the desired privileges.

In 1521, Sickingen went for an even closer connection to Hapsburg and, upon imperial order, carried out a self-financed campaign against the French King. He recruited 4,000 horsemen and 15,000 foot soldiers and entered French territory. However, he had to withdraw following the aborted siege of the fortress of Mezières. At the end of the campaign the emperor owed him 96,000 guilders, and Sickingen's war chest, erstwhile chock-full, was now completely empty.[47] Repayment of a loan to Strasburg was therefore delayed by some months.[48] His fraught financial situation manifested itself when, in May 1522, he instructed his friend, the knight Hartmut von Kronberg, to ask the Frankfurt councillors for a loan. He suggested that he draw special attention to the emperor's outstanding accounts. He furthermore tried to recover outstanding monies. In spring 1522, he asked the Mainz cathedral chapter to pay 200 guilders, and the knight was still hoping for 100 guilders each from the customs offices of Engers and Boppard.[49]

On 31 July, Sickingen again wrote to his friends in Strasburg. After having paid off the previous loan he asked them for a further payment of 8,000 guilders, which he wanted to repay by 2 February 1523.[50] The Strasburgers quickly granted his wish and paid remitted the sum on 5 August 1522. A few days later they received information concerning the use of the money; Sickingen wrote that he was planning a campaign, not directed against the emperor and beneficial to Strasburg.[51]

After Sickingen had ordered his finances to the best of his abilities, he tried to achieve a closer union of the lower aristocracy. In summer 1522 many knights from the west and the south-west of the *Reich* met in Landau. The *Brotherly Union* of 13 August included a programme in defence of the knights, in which, apart from general guidelines concerning correct lifestyle, especially organisational questions of chivalric coexistence took up much space. The meeting made Sickingen captain, whose main task consisted of mediating internal disputes. There was no aggressive let alone revolutionary element in the Landau resolution.

A few days later Franz von Sickingen sent the Elector of Trier, Richard von Greiffenklau, his feud letter. The reason he gave was a monetary claim against the Trier citizens Jakob von Kröv and Richard von Senheim. Sickingen had ransomed them from his noble peer Heinrich von der Tann. He had paid 5,000 guilders ransom and spent an additional 150 guilders for board and lodging for the 22-week stay of the Trier subjects in Heinrich's castle, or so he stated in his feud letter written at the end of August 1522. There is some evidence supporting the view of Johann Flade, Trier's town chronicler, that Sickingen was the mastermind behind this shakedown, thereby creating an excuse for the feud.[52] The real reasons for this feud, however, seem to go deeper.

Some clues to Sickingen's motives can be found in the report produced by the messenger of the Imperial Government. The knight supposedly informed him in the camp in front of the gates of Trier that he wanted to create a better law, in order to strengthen the *Reich's* inner peace. In this discussion he also mentioned the Emperor, who still owed him 60,000 guilders. This money he now wanted to take from the Trier Elector, who had, as was well known, received large payments from the French King prior to the royal election.[53] The knight obviously wanted to use this argument to drive a wedge between the Electorate of Trier and the Emperor.

Richard von Greiffenklau, the Elector of Trier, however, did not require help from the *Reich*. He had already planned for a possible conflict with Sickingen and had signed a mutual assistance treaty with the Electoral Palatinate in 1518. During the Diet of Worms this agreement was extended into a triple alliance to include Hesse, and expressly reaffirmed in Oberwesel in 1522.

To make matters worse, the Imperial Government did not remain neutral, but immediately issued mandates against Sickingen. These exhorted all cities and territories to recall any of their mercenaries serving in his army, and ordered them to block passage through their territories to the auxiliary forces. Under these conditions, and with almost empty coffers, Sickingen could keep up the siege of Trier for only a week, and, on 14 September, his army withdrew empty-handed from the city on the Mosel. During the retreat to the Palatinate, he ordered the complements of castles Nanstein and Ebernburg to obtain powder and to augment the artillery.

At first, Sickingen's enemies turned against all those who had supported the knight: they laid siege to Hartmut von Kronberg's castles and other fortified buildings in Hesse, Franconia, and the Palatinate. They forced Albrecht, the Bishop of Mainz, to pay 20,000 guilders because he had backed Sickingen. Together with the Imperial Government they carried out investigations against possible supporters in almost all of the *Reich*. Strasburg also had to justify its payments to Sickingen, managed, however, to avoid punishment due to its clever diplomats.[54]

In the spring of 1523, the princes united against Sickingen had finished their preparations for a campaign against the main culprit. On 24 April they marched on castle Nanstein, above Landstuhl. A week later they began the barrage. Kaspar Sturm, the Imperial Herald, described the campaign in detail: the concentrated artillery shelling of castle Nanstein was, for him, without precedent. There "*many horrible shots were taken, with canon, Kartouwen, and Culverines, etc, which, without a doubt, has not happened or been heard again in these lands...*"[55] During the barrage, Sickingen was wounded. In an undated letter to Balthasar Schlör, he wrote that he had been injured by falling masonry. The effects were so severe that he died on 7 May 1523. The princes captured and destroyed his other castles in the following weeks.

The victors subsequently worked hard to find Sickingen's other supporters. The basis for their work was the statements given by the complement of castle Nanstein. The list thus created comprised 34 cities and persons who supported Sickingen materially or morally, or were only suspected of having done so. The list reads like a *Who's Who* of Palatinate and Swabian nobility. Counts Reinhard von Bitsch, Wilhelm and Friedrich von Fürstenberg are listed, as are Ulrich von Hutten, Dietrich Spät, Wolf von Berlichingen, Johann Hilchen von Lorch, or Dieter von Gemmingen. They also found numerous lists in Sickingen's castles, which provided insight into his extensive financial network.

These records gave the victors cause to pursue Sickingen's helpers throughout 1523. The campaigns of revenge against parts of the lower nobility were carried out under the pretext of enforcing the law. Oftentimes, however, self-serving economic and political goals were the real reason. This sometimes resulted in legal problems that, in one case, could only be solved twelve years after Sickingen's death: on 2 October 1525, Friedrich vom Hagen, who had been imprisoned when castle Nanstein was captured, swore an oath of truce to the Elector. This was the official end to the dispute.

For Sickingen's family, the aftermath was, at first, serious. The sons Schweikard, Hans, and Franz Conrad were financially ruined, as the entire estate had been confiscated by the victors. Soon supporters appeared, however, who were interested in the *Reich's* quick stabilisation and something akin to a balance of power. Charles V argued for the heirs, as did the dukes of Bavaria, the rich town of Strasburg, the Elector of Mainz, and the Bishop of Speyer. The Elector of Trier had already lobbied for Sickingen's son with the Hessian landgrave in 1526. He, however, initially stood firm. In 1532, Ludwig V of the Palatinate gave in. Step by step the tough terms for the sons were relaxed, and so, in 1533, castle Hochkönig in Alsace became Sickingen property. In 1542, a line was drawn under the events and the property returned to the sons.

Feuds subsequently declined in number, but increased again as the legal system proved glaringly deficient. This is why the *Constitutio Criminalis Carolina* (short: *Carolina*) of 1532, Charles V's criminal law, reintroduced the expedient of the feud, and again distinguished between legitimate and illegitimate feuds. Despite this, *Perpetual Peace* prevailed. This development finally resulted in the state's monopoly on the use of force, which constitutes a characteristic of a state.



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[1] Reinhard Scholzen, *Franz von Sickingen. Ein adeliges Leben im Spannungsfeld zwischen Städten und Territorien*, Kaiserslautern, 1996, p. 33-36.

- [2] It is impossible to calculate the value of this sum in today's currency. It is possible, however, to calculate how much gold was used in these coins. In an attempt to use the same means of calculation for all sums quoted in this text, the definition laid down by the *Kurrheinischen Münzverein* in 1523 will be used. At that time, a guilder had to include 2.527 grams of the precious metal. 24,300 guilders therefore represented a weight of more than 61 kilograms pure gold. cf. Scholzen, p.303.
- [3] Otto Böcher, 'Die Ebernburg - Geschichte und Baugeschichte', in, *Ebernburg-Hefte*, 22, 1988, p.117-145.
- [4] Ludwig Spuhler, 'Der Bergbau in der Pfalz', in, Willi Alter, ed., *Pfalzatl*, vol 1, Speyer, 1964, p.117-148. Here p. 128/29.
- [5] Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg, inventory 3, no. 110, vol. 44.
- [6] Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg, inventory 3, no. 110, vol. 1-42v.
- [7] cf. Scholzen, p.42.
- [8] Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz, inventory 33, no. 9913, p 934.
- [9] Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz, inventory 54, p 935.
- [10] Scholzen, p.37-49.
- [11] Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg, inventory 3, no. 110, vol. 49-51.
- [12] Heinz Laubenstein, *Die Entwicklung des Münzwesens und der Hausgenossen des Erzbistums sowie der Stadt Mainz vom 10.-15. Jahrhundert*, Diss. Jur. masch., Mainz n.d, no. 13.
- [13] Otto Brunner, *Land und Herrschaft. Grundfragen der territorialen Verfassungsgeschichte Österreichs im Mittelalter*, Darmstadt, 1984, reprint of the fifth edition, Vienna, 1965.
- [14] Boockmann, A., 'Fehde', in, *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 4, Munich, 1989, column 332.
- [15] l.c., column 333.
- [16] cf. Uta Lindgren, 'Kölner Fehden als Problem von Verwaltung und Verfassung', in, *Jahrbuch des Kölnischen Geschichtsvereins 54*, 1983, p. 1-134.
- [17] concerning the following, see: Scholzen, p.34ff.
- [18] In the language of the times, rich in images, the threat is even clearer. The citizen of Worms must pay Schlör the money back which he had lent him "... *vff sonder vertrueen vnd glauben zu sinem merklichen nutz*" [on the basis of special trust and for his special benefit] and the threat immediately follows, as he would otherwise have to think about "... *wie ich vonn Vch vnnd den uwern sollicher schuldenn Betzalung vnnd erstattung der billikeyt bekom. Das ich doch gegen Vch, der gemeynde vnnd statt halb lieber vertragen bliebe, beger heruff uwer beschreibenn antwort*" [how I would get the debts back from you. That I would rather get along with you, the community, and town] Ernst Münch, *Franz von Sickingens Thaten, Plane, Freunde und Ausgang*, 3 vol., Stuttgart, Tübingen 1827-1829, vol. 3, no. 2, p.2. cf: Wilhelm Arnold (ed.), *Wormser Chronik von Friedrich Zorn mit den Zusätzen Franz Bertholds von Flersheim. Stuttgart 1857* (Bibliothek des litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart 43). p.243.
- [19] Archives Municipales Strasbourg, inventory AA 369, vol. 17.
- [20] Helgard Ulmschneider, *Götz von Berlichingen. Mein Fehd und Handlungen*, Sigmaringen 1981 (Forschungen aus Württembergisch Franken, published by Historischer Verein für Württembergisch Franken, ~~the~~ Stadtarchiv Schwäbisch Hall and Hohenlohe-Zentralarchiv Neuenstein 17). p.79/80.
- [21] Scholzen, p.65/66.
- [22] Heinrich Ulmann, *Franz von Sickingen*, Leipzig, 1872, p.54.
- [23] Otto Waltz, *Die Flersheimer Chronik. Zur Geschichte des XV. und XVI. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig, 1874, p.59.
- [24] Munich, vol. 2, no. 18, p.42.
- [25] K. Klüpfel (ed.), *Urkunden zur Geschichte des Schwäbischen Bundes (1488-1533) Teil 2: 1507-1533, Stuttgart 1853* (Bibliothek des litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart 31), p. 136
- [26] Staatsarchiv Nürnberg, Nürnberger Ratsverlässe no. 608, vol. 30.
- [27] Staatsarchiv Nürnberg, Nürnberger Ratsverlässe no. 608, vol. 26v and 30.
- [28] Stadtarchiv Memmingen, vol. 294/7.
- [29] Klüpfel, p.143/44.
- [30] Scholzen, p. 73.
- [31] Stadtarchiv Landau, inventory Bl 4a, vol. 210.
- [32] Stadtarchiv Memmingen, inventory Bd. 294/7. Kyri Gartner and Peter Strobel to the Memmingen council: 8 July 1517.
- [33] Stadtarchiv Memmingen, vol. Bd. 294/7. Letter of the mayor and the council of Memmingen to the army near Wimpfen, 15 August 1517.
- [34] Hans Virck, *Politische Correspondenz der Stadt Strassburg im Zeitalter der Reformation, vol. 1*, Strasbourg 1882, no. 48, p.18.
- [35] Stadtarchiv Ulm, inventory A 1132/1, vol. 57.
- [36] Munich, Bd. 2, no. 23, p.59/60.
- [37] Heinrich Boos, 'Franz von Sickingen und die Stadt Worms', in, *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberheins 42*, 1988, p.385-422. Here p. 419/20.
- [38] The merchants from the cities of southern Germany had to wait some time; however, they profited from the fact that they played an important supporting role in the election of 1519. Hapsburg feared that the quarrels between the cities and the Elector from the Palatinate could drive him into the hands of the French competitor for the German crown, which is why the cities received 9,000 guilders in compensation, which made the problem disappear. cf.: Greiff, 'Was Kayser Carolus dem V. die Römisch küniglich Wahl cost im 1520 Jar', in, *Jahresberichte des historischen Vereins im Regierungsbezirk Schwaben und Neuburg 1868*, p. 9-50. Here: p. 39/40.
- [39] Scholzen, S.124f.
- [40] Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe, Bestand 72, Fasc. 63: Sickingen.
- [41] In a letter kept in the Frankfurt City Archive it says that they "*nit gewiest hettern, ob die Ihenen so by vnns vbermacht, vnnd der wir noch warten gewest, mit Franciscen zu einer zeit angekert, der glichenn ob sie sich vonn allen theylen verglichen vnnd liden muger*" [did not know ... whether they would like each other]. Stadtarchiv Frankfurt am Main, Bestand RS II.
- [42] *Deutsche Reichstagsakten, Jüngere Reihe*, vol. 1, no. 157, p.434.
- [43] *Deutsche Reichstagsakten, Jüngere Reihe*, vol. 1, no. 373, p.837.
- [44] cf. Scholzen, p. 172ff.
- [45] Franz, p. 61.
- [46] Ulmann, p. 163.
- [47] Waltz, p. 70/71.
- [48] Virck, vol. 1, no. 90, p. 55.
- [49] Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg, inventory 3, no. 121, vol. 8.
- [50] Virck, vol. 1, no. 92, p.56.
- [51] *ibid.*, no. 95, p. 56/57.
- [52] Johann Flade, 'Wie Franz von Sickingen den Stift beschedigt und sampt Johann Hilchen von Lorch diese Stat Trier beleget hat in Septembri des Jars 1522', in, Karl Hans Rendenbach, *Die Fehde Franz von Sickingens gegen Trier*, Berlin, 1933, p. 57.
- [53] Haus-, Hof und Staatsarchiv Wien, Reichstagsakten in genere, Kart. 2, Konv. 1522, vol. 114-115.
- [54] cf. Scholzen, p.234ff.
- [55] Sturm, Caspar, *wallicher bericht...* Stadtbibliothek Trier, inventory T 142, vol. A IV v. Reinhard von Neuneck described the barrage (during which 600 rounds were allegedly fired) in a similar manner, and especially stressed that he had never before heard of such severe shelling. cf. Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe, inventory 77, no. 3669.

